



Inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions

Latrobe City Council Submission
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Introduction

Latrobe City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide its response to the Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions.

Latrobe City is one of Victoria's four major Regional Cities, located 135 km east of Melbourne. The City owns and operates Latrobe Regional Gallery, a public gallery housing significant public collections and presenting a program of exhibitions, education and public events. Latrobe City currently operates Latrobe Performing Arts Centre which includes a 277 seat theatre and 400 seat hall. Latrobe City is also building a new 750 seat Performing Arts Centre set in a creative precinct that will also see the establishment of a Creative Industries Training Centre and Incubator.

Latrobe City's investment in creative and cultural industries and institutions is set within a context of significant and sustained social and economic transition. Our region has been and will continue to be impacted by structural change in Australia's energy sector and the resulting loss of employment.

Latrobe City is committed to supporting and advocating for economic diversification. Investment in creative and cultural industries helps to facilitate attraction of other industries but also offers the opportunity to develop and export new creative and cultural products that use technology to distribute and deliver.

The submission offers a regional perspective on creative and cultural industries and institutions, the impact of disruptions such as bushfire and COVID-19 and highlights the opportunity to reposition how creative and cultural activity is supported, produced and presented from the perspective of a region in economic transition.

Economic Benefits

Creative and cultural production is a highly complex industry that relies on a network of supply and demand linkages with other industries. Over 70 ANZSIC¹ industry classes are either wholly or partially connected to various supply chain inputs that drive creative and cultural production.²

Capturing and quantifying this economic activity is masked by the nature of creative work. Artists and creatives often operate as independent micro-enterprises engaged via short term contracts, commissions and gigs and supplement this income with work in unrelated industries.

In the regional context, a vast majority of cultural activity is funded and presented by local government owned institutions such as public galleries and performing arts centres, as well as other activities such as public programs and public art. Councils act as commissioners, presenters and producers in the creative and cultural industries as this activity has a multiplying effect in the economy; stimulating demand in the hospitality, retail and tourism sectors as well as supply in the construction, logistics and services sectors.

However, artists and creatives in regional areas are disadvantaged by a lack of access to arts education and training, and the critical mass and access to resources that drives artist led activity in metropolitan areas. This is magnified in a region like Latrobe City where a general flattening of available discretionary

¹ Australian and New Zealand Standard Industry Classification

² ABS: Discussion Paper: Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts (cat. no. 5271.0.55.001)

income means that even if artists are able to produce work locally they need to look to outside markets to make this activity economically viable.

Additional pressure is felt by the small businesses and sole traders that provide support to the creative industries; such as technicians, audio and visual services, project and program management as well as those small businesses that directly engage via media production, community arts and provision of creative services and learning. Supporting and sustaining these businesses is critical to ensuring that creative industries as a whole are supported; this presents an additional challenge in regional areas where there are regular local disruptions such as bushfire and loss of industry, as well as broader disruptions such as COVID and the ongoing economic impact.

Ongoing engagement with artists, creatives, small businesses, tertiary institutions and community stakeholders in Latrobe City has identified that sustained and long term investment is required to stimulate local activity and capacity. While Latrobe City Council has already committed to new cultural infrastructure and is working with higher education and industry partners to close the capacity gap, investment targeted towards stimulating creative industry development would enable the establishment of a new export industry for Latrobe City – creative and cultural production.

Recommendations

1. Invest in the production of Cultural and Creative Satellite Accounts by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to accurately capture and quantify the economic impact of the creative and cultural industries.
2. Establish targeted funding for regional areas to invest in creative industry incubation and capacity building to intra and interstate export of cultural products. Ensure this funding supports capital and program investment.
3. Support the establishment of funded traineeships and pathway programs in the creative industries that are delivered by the creative industries with higher education partners.
4. Develop an incentive scheme for established arts companies to relocate or satellite their operations to regional centres in partnership with local Councils.
5. Ensure that small businesses in the creative industries are able to access additional long terms supports to assist with establishment, sustainability and recovery from disruptive events such as bushfire and COVID.

Community & Social Benefits

The health, community and social benefits of access to creative and cultural access and participation are well studied and documented.³ There are individual mental health benefits in making art and being creative but also social benefits in promoting communication, cooperation and shared identity.

The beneficial impacts of access to creative and cultural products as audience are also well documented. Public galleries are meeting places, stimulate conversation and provoke new ways of engaging in social issues, but also offer a respite from individual and community issues. Performing arts programs offer shared experiences, enjoyment and opportunities to connect to the community. Public art enhances

³ https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/Indicators/Overview-sheets/16/VH_IO_Arts-participation.pdf

feelings of safety and supports enjoyment and level of comfort in public spaces. Public festivals enable board community access to creative programs and experiences.

Aside from these positive individual and social benefits, there is a flow on economic benefit to investment in community access to arts, culture and creative activity. Arts-led intervention offers real pathways to improved social and health outcomes, and this has been demonstrated in addressing mental health, drug and alcohol dependence and family violence as well as improved support to people with a disability. Diversion and early intervention via arts-led activity leads to improved outcomes and lessens reliance on crisis intervention and support.

Latrobe City experiences high rates of disadvantage across a broad range of indicators. While regional and rural Australia regularly experiences higher rates of disadvantage than metropolitan centres, in Latrobe City this is compounded by the inter-generational nature of that disadvantage.

Latrobe City also has active and engaged community arts groups that offer enormous social benefit and community connection and wellbeing to their members. Local theatre groups, community choirs and local bands and orchestras have a wide reaching community presence. Artist led spaces offer social and community learning opportunities while also supporting the studio practice of artists through access to shared equipment. Smaller artist-led galleries help provide valuable stepping stones to artists as they develop their practice. These are housed in community and tertiary education spaces.

The issue for community arts groups and artist-led spaces is financial viability as they are reliant on fundraising and volunteer labour, resources that are sensitive to broader social and economic change. This also an issue for community led festivals and events which are highly reliant on sponsorship from local business as well as community grants and volunteer labour to deliver.

These groups also have limited success in seeking funding for their activity in a highly competitive environment at State and Federal levels where funding is tied strongly to 'excellence' not participation. For tertiary institutions that support this work, funding is very difficult to secure.

Council does offer guidance and support to community groups to seek funding and generate earned income, but this is time intensive work that requires dedicated resources.

Latrobe City has committed to providing its own services, programs and cultural infrastructure in a way that balances cultural and social access and fiscal responsibility. Additional support to enable greater community participation would complement this position and enable investment in local community arts activity.

Recommendations

1. Provision of dedicated non-competitive funding to regional Councils and arts organizations to support establishment of community arts programs and capacity building in partnership with tertiary institutions.
2. Develop specific funding streams for regional community arts; or fund regional Councils to deliver this funding stream directly as minor stimulus grants.
3. Invest in residency programs that place artists and creatives within community support services to design and deliver arts-led diversion and early intervention programs.
4. Investment into the establishment and support of artist-led spaces and enterprises in both community and education settings.

5. Support for community led arts festivals to build and sustain a resource base to enable continued delivery following disruptive events.

Cooperation between Layers of Government

Each level of Government has responsibility for support of and investment into creative and cultural industries and a collaborative long term approach with a clearly defined strategy is crucial to deliver on this responsibility.

Mechanisms that enable a broad range of interests and inputs to form a united roadmap for creative and cultural industry recovery will support the work of all elements of the industry. Although the establishment of a Creative Economy Taskforce is welcomed, there are significant gaps in representation – notably regional, theatre and community arts interests and no practicing contemporary artists.

Additionally, policy settings that enable artists to access income supports and stimulus measures would be welcomed.

Recommendation

1. Work with peak national and state bodies to ensure regional, theatre, community arts and practicing artist interests are considered and included in the Government's response and strategy.
2. Adjust income support settings so that artists and independent creative practitioners can access income support and stimulus measures.

Impact of COVID-19

Since Government COVID-19 restrictions in Latrobe City commenced in March 2020, the impact of COVID-19 on creative industries has been profound.

For the networks of regional performing arts centres this has triggered mass-refunding, loss of all income, multiple attempts to reschedule touring works and in Victoria no indication of when any activity may be able to commence. There is also the risk of contract default as presenters struggle to remount tours that have been financially committed and unable to be presented.

The response from the industry is to look at new ways to develop and tour work, and this innovation is welcome, however it will radically change operating models for regional performing arts centres across Australia. Latrobe City has developed an operating model which will be able to pivot successfully, but it is contingent on the producers of performing arts content also being able to pivot.

For regional galleries, COVID-19 has prompted a drive to present works digitally which has had a positive impact on audience development and access. Galleries in Victoria were able to reopen in June, but were forced to close again in early August.

At Latrobe Regional Gallery this disruption has budgetary impacts as exhibition programs are rescheduled for a third time in the space of six months. The flow on effect to artists and touring presenters has been profound in an already difficult environment.

Conservation and collection management have also been impacted with requirements for climate control conflicting with recommendations on COVID-19 safe operations. This has meant that planned conservation has been delayed to accommodate for limited attendance on site and constraints in freight services.

Community and artist-led activity has been heavily impacted by these disruptions, with many artists and creatives losing planned projects and work in excess of 18 months. Community led festivals have largely had to cancel as the barrier of negotiating uncertainty or digital delivery has proved too difficult or costly to facilitate.

Recommendations

1. Direct relief to assist with contractually committed performing arts and exhibition remount costs.
2. Support to strengthen or establish online platforms that invite creative presentation of performing arts, collection and exhibition content and online public programs.
3. Support for community and artist-led festivals, events and activities to sustain and rebuild their programs.

Innovation & the Digital Environment

There has been significant uplift in production of online content across the performing arts and in public galleries. This activity requires access to equipment, production capacity and expertise in order to produce quality content that best represents artists and connects meaningfully with audiences.

In regional areas a capacity and resource gap is limiting access to digital engagement as audiences, artists, producers and presenters do not have the network infrastructure or available equipment to view or broadcast livestream and video content.

Latrobe City has successfully produced quality performing arts and gallery content, and this has been a highly positive outcome from the disruption of COVID-19 on audience development and engagement. However, it would not have been financially viable or possible without access to in-house expertise in film and content production – skill sets that are not readily available in regional settings.

While digital engagement offers a wealth of possibilities for audiences, artists and cultural institutions, there are some structural inequalities in how accessible this is in regions with significant social and economic disadvantage.

Targeted investment into the establishment of community based media production capability, and training programs that enable local creative capacity could unlock digital export as a viable option for regional creative industries.

In addition, support for community-led public festivals to transition to online or blended delivery will enable a more robust delivery model that can withstand disruptions more effectively.

Recommendations

1. Establish targeted capital funding support to establish and equip media production hubs in regional areas.
2. Create incentives for media and film production in regional areas that attach traineeships for local creatives in partnership with Councils and higher education providers.
3. Invest in network capacity in regional and rural areas to support digital access and digital export.
4. Specific support for small businesses that support access to technology and creative use of technology.