

# Creative democracy

## Jon Hawkes, 25/10/06

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I am honoured and humbled to find myself speaking to you today.

Ever since reading George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* as a teenager, this place has been a beacon.

For me, and I'm sure for many of my generation, Barcelona became a symbol, not only of the horrors of war, but also of democratic struggle, of applied grass-roots decision-making, and of course, of extraordinary creative practices that synthesised the modern and the traditional, the intuitive and the rational, dreams and reality.

Barcelona, the home of Casals, Dali, Miro and Gaudi, the inspiration for Bunuel and Picasso, became our inspiration too.

In 1981-82 this love came home. I had the privilege and pleasure of working with the creators of *La Claca*, Joan Baixas and Teresa Carafel, on a new show for our company in Australia. Through them, I learnt that Catalonia is indeed a special state of mind, a unique attitude.

And, in preparing for this talk, I discovered that Barcelona continues to break new ground exploring ways of enhancing citizen participation, which as I understand it, is at the foundation of this conference.

Further research led me to the work of Josep Anselm Clavé and Lluís Millet. These two men initiated processes of community singing in Catalonia that continue to this day. Based as they are, on an appreciation of the profoundly powerful effects that singing can have on participants, I dedicate this speech to the memory of these two, who understood so clearly that singing together is an essential part of living together.

I'm here, I think, largely through the efforts of one man, Jordi Pascual. Since the publication of my small book in March 2001, Jordi has promoted the ideas it contained with singular energy and enthusiasm. My thanks go to him and to the organisers of this conference for gambling that I would have something worthwhile to say today.

I feel the need to emphasise that my ideas have been formed out of my own experience. I come from a country that has been governed by conservatives for the last decade and that has been in thrall to the prophets of 'the market is god' for twice that time. Government policies on refugees are in breach of international covenants, there are Australian troops in Iraq, many of Australia's indigenous people have a third world life expectancy, public utilities have been privatised, free education and healthcare are distant memories.

Nevertheless it is my home and I cannot but love my place and my people. You will probably detect frustration and anger in some of what I say, but I have not given up hope. I come from a harsh place, but there are many harsher, and there are a million examples of peoples that have overcome much worse conditions than those I experience.

And so to begin.

The public planning sector has been awash with new 'paradigms' for at least two decades. For all their variety, they share common concerns: community health and wellbeing, cohesiveness, engagement and sustainability.

These paradigms also share an appreciation of the cause of community decline.

It is disconnectedness.

The breakdown of a shared sense of purpose, the disappearance of a sense of belonging to groups that are living and preparing for the future **together**, the proliferation of isolation and alienation.

It is in addressing these issues that culture can be extremely valuable.

One of the most useful ways of looking at culture is to think of it as describing the ways that we make sense of our lives together, or in more formal terms, as the social production of meaning.

There is growing recognition of the benefits that come from communities being regularly and actively involved in expressing their aspirations and identity – of making sense together.

And of all the things we make together, perhaps 'sense' is the most important.

The challenge is to develop the conditions in which this involvement can become a normal and everyday part of public life.

I make two claims:

- **First:** That one of the essential preconditions of a society becoming fully and effectively democratic is that public decision-making is informed by inclusive and participatory community-engaging processes that encourage and respond to diversity.
- **Second:** That there are a range of practical activities that can catalyse (and are the roots of) a group of people's capacity and desire to become community.

A corollary to this second claim is that social engagement is best 'seeded' in an environment of:

- supportive curiosity;
- unthreatening stimulation; and,
- creative co-operation.

And that there need to be rewards for this engagement that:

- are easily achievable;
- are immediately pleasurable; and,
- ideally, are only experienceable in the moment. That is, that create a desire to return, again and again, to the activity.

A further corollary is that while these environments may possibly exist in cyberspace, they have become increasingly hard to find in the physical world.

For public services dedicated to community health, in its widest sense, this is a fundamental challenge.

One way to approach this challenge is to develop systems that, within the processes of government, integrate the cultural dimension of human existence into the ways that we facilitate public life.

The function that culture fills in life on earth has long been debated and declared in international forums.

- Forty years ago the UN adopted the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*
- In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development published *Our Common Future* (known as the Brundtland Report). While this document did not explicitly mention culture as a key issue, it introduced the idea of sustainability.
- 1992 saw the *Rio Declaration* that included Agenda 21, the local focus.

- In 1995, *Our Creative Diversity* highlighted culture as the 'last frontier' of development.
- In 1998, the action plan from the Stockholm Conference, *The Power of Culture*, sought to transform the ideas in the *Rio Declaration* and *Our Creative Diversity* into practice.
- In 2000, the *Santorini Statement* declared: 'States have a right and responsibility to implement policies and programs that support diverse artistic and cultural activities and to protect these from unwanted interventions from outside political or economic forces.'
- In 2001, the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* recognised, for the first time, cultural diversity as a 'common heritage of humanity as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature' and made its defence an ethical imperative indissociable from respect for the dignity of the individual.
- The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development saw Chirac and others call for the recognition of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability.
- And in 2004, UCLG was founded. It adopted the *Agenda 21 for culture* as a guiding document for its public cultural policies. The declaration stated that culture has become an indispensable dimension for development.

So, culture has been on the agenda for as long as most of the people in this room have been adults. But, to this day, what meaning we choose to give the word and how we go about applying it in the realm of policy making, continue to be, I believe, seriously debilitated.

It was in an attempt to offer some clarity to thinking about culture that, in 2000, I was commissioned by the Cultural Development Network of Victoria (in Australia) to write a monograph on the topic. The result, entitled *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: culture's essential role in public planning*, was specifically designed for local government readership. It begins with this summary:

'A society's values are the basis upon which all else is built. These values and the ways they are expressed are a society's culture. The way a society governs itself cannot be fully democratic without there being clear avenues for the expression of community values, and unless these expressions directly affect the directions society takes. These processes are culture at work.

'Cultural vitality is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability. In order for public planning to be more effective, its methodology should include an integrated framework of cultural evaluation along similar lines to those being developed for social, environmental and economic impact assessment.'

As you can hear in these paragraphs, I am utterly convinced that there is an essential connection between culture and democracy.

However, the current use of the concept of culture has become so attenuated that this connection has all but disappeared. Indeed it is not at all difficult to mount a convincing argument that many public interventions into the cultural sector have profoundly anti-democratic manifestations.

It is not that culture is not on the agenda. Indeed, governments have been developing cultural policies for at least two decades. But most of them have been arts (or at best, arts and heritage) policies. This, in itself, is no bad thing, except that, by calling them cultural policies, public servants have deprived themselves of an exceptionally useful tool in their planning kits.

The confusion between culture meaning 'art' (and often only the 'high' arts) and culture referring to a society's way of life continues to haunt virtually everything that is said about public culture.

Since the late 80s, sustainable development has been the catchcry of responsible policy makers. In the English-speaking world, this idea gelled into what has become known as ecologically sustainable development or the triple bottom line. Other cultures have other names for what is essentially the same idea.

All variants have been an attempt to ensure that the economic triumphalism of the seventies would, in future, take into account the human and ecological costs that often went (and still, in many cases, continue to go) unremarked. Rampant economic development has social and environmental impacts that must be acknowledged.

The best way to do this was judged to be to replicate the economic overview. Just as every piece of policy is picked to pieces by the accountants, the emerging methodologies insisted that **all** policy should be evaluated for its environmental and social impacts.

While this approach appears to have achieved a fairly widespread acceptance in theory, in practice it appears, to me at least, that the accountants continue to reign supreme.

As I've said earlier, my book introduces the idea of an extra dimension, a cultural perspective, being added to the triple bottom line. When I first began making this argument, I accepted the triple bottom line as a reasonable concept, simply requiring the addition of a fourth line to make it work effectively.

What I have realised since writing *The Fourth Pillar* is that the triple bottom line is, in reality, a spectacular fraud. Or at least, has been transmogrified into something less than its originators intended.

Its rhetoric sounds like a profound development from the singular perspective of the economic fundamentalists, but in fact, all it really is an attempt to bring social and environmental issues into an economic context

- unless the workers and consumers are comfortable, business will not be able to achieve maximum performance;
- unless the environment is still there, business will be unable to continue to make a profit from it.

Humanising the market, yes, but simultaneously, marketising the human.

So, one of the things I've been doing since *The Fourth Pillar* came out is looking very carefully at the other three perspectives. What I have come to realise is just how pernicious and extensive the ideology of economic rationalism has been. The crusaders of this fundamentalist cult have not only promoted the 'free market' (an oxymoron as pernicious as that other myth - 'healthy competition') as the basis of all human relations, they have transformed the meanings of great slabs of our vocabulary.

As always, powerful ideas, no matter how vile, have to contain a sliver of truth. And the slim truth in economic fundamentalism is that, at the heart of the human condition, is exchange. Except that in their sacred texts, exchange is transformed into trade. Applying a price to every transaction is their most fundamental error.

This is nowhere more evident than in the concepts of economic and social policy. Under the new religion, economic policy has come to refer solely to matters concerned with operations of 'the market' and social policy to looking after those so damaged that they can't find their way to the market.

So, just as the concept of culture needed to be extended beyond its popular usage in order to make it a useful planning tool, I think a similar job needs to be done on the other three perspectives.

I chose *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* as the title for my book because it was a catchy quotation. My decision was reinforced by an argument put to me that it was the Engineers in local government that would be the most difficult to convince, and that they were an enormously powerful interest group. Best then to choose a metaphor with which they would feel comfortable.

I have regretted this decision from the moment I made it. Pillars are unmistakably phallic and irredeemably associated with classicism, empires and engineering.

And the concept of sustainability is easily twisted into the idea of finding ways and excuses to continue current practices. Sustainability is becoming interchangeable with conservatism. How do we maintain our standards (moral, economic or whatever)? is becoming - perhaps already has become - the question.

In the matter of culture, the same issue emerges. 'Cultural sustainability' means very different things to different people. There's a school of thought that uses it to mean 'preserving the canon'.

I understand that the original intention of those that introduced this concept was to highlight the fact that we can't go on like this - that humanity's survival depended on behavioural change. But, as George Orwell has so eloquently demonstrated, and as George Bush has so effectively implemented, language can be diametrically twisted.

Not long after the publication of *The Fourth Pillar*, a local government in my home town decided to use my proposals as the basis of their planning. Shortly after its introduction, staff began referring to the 'four pillows of sustainability'. As is so often the case, humour displayed truth. These four perspectives are not towers upon which a grand idea is balanced - they are, or should be, pliable buffers that can protect us from the jagged outcrops of unthought through consequences.

I really would prefer another metaphor. I've played with:

- The four dimensions of democracy
- The four wings of wellbeing
- The four perspectives on participation
- The four strands of diversity
- The four elements of engagement

But I recognise that I'm stuck with pillars of sustainability. Once something is named, it's almost impossible to go back.

However, I do stand by the four. Why? I recognise that the taxonomy of ideas is even more artificial, not to say arbitrary, than that which we invent for the natural world. In the end, it's an aesthetic judgement, combined with a decision on what is the least number of markers that can be used to cover the largest amount of conceptual space. I figured that if the ancients felt that four elements were adequate, and the tarot card diviners that four suits would do the job, then surely four dimensions were enough for a town planner.

And, not coincidentally, it seems to me that the fundamental questions that a public planner needs to ask number four:

ONE: What do we start with?

TWO: Who decides?

THREE: Who benefits?

FOUR: Where do we want to go?

I think that, if genuinely democratic and engaging processes are used to develop answers to these four questions, it becomes possible to be confident that citizens will be really able to actively participate in 'making sense together'.

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Environment</b>	<b>Society</b>	<b>Economy</b>	<b>Culture</b>
<b>Perspective</b>	Respect	Inclusivity	Equity	Vitality
<b>Fundamental question</b>	What?	Who?	How?	Why?
<b>Operational question</b>	What do we start with?	Who decides?	Who benefits?	Where do we want to go?
<b>Creation, distribution &amp; maintenance of:</b>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Power</i>	<i>Wealth</i>	<i>Ideas</i>
<b>Concept</b>	CONTEXT	STRUCTURE	PRODUCTION	PURPOSE
<b>Key concern</b>	Diversity	Connection	Distribution	Animation
<b>Public function</b>	Mapping	Governance	Commonwealth	Planning
<b>Need</b>	Grounding	Relations	Sustenance	Spirit
<b>Dimension</b>	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
<b>Idea</b>	Ground	Spread	Pile	Travel
<b>Image</b>	LINE	CIRCLE	PYRAMID	TIME
<b>Element</b>	Water	Air	Earth	Fire
<b>Suit</b>	Cups	Swords	Coins	Wands
<b>Idea</b>	Memory	Organisation	Trade	Initiative

**Figure 1: The Framework of 4: Dimensions of Democracy, Elements of Engagement, Perspectives of Participation, Strands of Sustainability**

The first question, what do we start with?, addresses the CONTEXT in which we find ourselves; the RESOURCES that surround us.

The second question, who decides?, addresses the STRUCTURE through which we will implement our objectives; the decision-making processes, the distribution of POWER.

The third question, who benefits?, addresses the PRODUCTION that will take place; the WEALTH (in its widest sense) that will be accumulated and how it will be distributed.

The fourth question, where do we want to go?, addresses the PURPOSE of our proposed actions; the IDEAS that inform our directions.

And again, not coincidentally, these questions match (or can be made to match) the four domains in which we can envisage our existence: we live in an environment, a society, an economy and a culture.

THE FIRST DIMENSION concerns the creation, distribution and maintenance of RESOURCES – the CONTEXT in which we find ourselves. This is the Environmental Perspective.

MAPPING is the key public function in this dimension – understanding the extent and the limits, the strength and the fragility and above all, the DIVERSITY of that for which we have custodial responsibilities - what do we start with?

This perspective should not just focus on the earth's physical resources and our exploitation of them, but on the living systems of which we are a part and the entire heritage from which we arise and for which we are responsible.

We are born into complex surroundings. Our environment is more than paddocks and rivers, trees and climate, roads and buildings. We are also surrounded by memories, attitudes, songs and stories. These inheritances are as much a part of our environment as the earth beneath our feet and the air we breath.

A comprehensive environmental perspective gives us the opportunity to analyse our behaviour and our intentions in the context of ecological dynamics; to look at all our resources – finite and renewable, human and physical, built and natural – and to plan for their protection, maintenance and regeneration.

This approach would allow the environmental perspective to facilitate the development of a wider appreciation of the global ecological system in which we exist and upon which we depend.

It would also locate our heritage in a context that takes into account its variety, its value and its multifarious forms, both tangible and intangible.

RESPECT is this dimension's watchword.

THE SECOND DIMENSION concerns the creation, distribution and maintenance of POWER – the organisational STRUCTURE of our society. This is the Social Perspective.

GOVERNANCE is the key public function that needs to be observed through this lens – who decides?

The key social issue at the forefront of this way of looking is CONNECTION – the webs of trust and mutual responsibility that hold us together.

These days 'social' appears to be almost exclusively about the welfare of the disadvantaged, about the provision of services to those who cannot afford to pay for them themselves: public housing, public health, unemployment benefits, aged care ... (that is, the stuff that present day economists can no longer be bothered with, or which they have been unable to find a way of privatising).

This is a terrible travesty of the concept of 'social'. A social perspective should focus on the organisational structures we have developed and the level of access to them, their capacity to deliver and the processes through which they are controlled and operated.

A social perspective should allow us to recognise that social organisation needs to be flexible and responsive, inclusive and engaging, open and transparent; that established structures and systems are neither 'natural' phenomena nor innately 'good' – they are the constructs of fallible humans which inevitably have, particular, often unacknowledged, interests. Constant vigilance is necessary, if we are to develop ways of organising ourselves that effectively fulfil our democratic aspirations. This should be the function and purpose of a social perspective.

In taking on a focus aimed at the efficient delivery of services (which should really be an economic matter), social policy makers have been denied their right to concern themselves with the democratic management of society.

As I've said already, GOVERNANCE is this dimension's key function and INCLUSIVITY is the watchword.

THE THIRD DIMENSION concerns the creation, distribution and maintenance of WEALTH – the PRODUCTION of the goods and services we need. This is the Economic Perspective.

From a public point of view, it is COMMONWEALTH, rather than simply wealth that is at issue here – who benefits?

And the benefits are manifest as much in DISTRIBUTION as they are in production.

The economic domain has become exclusively about the efficient accumulation of material wealth. Again, this is a travesty of what was once a way of analysing public activity that concerned itself with a much wider concept of wealth than merely the fiscal and that focused as much on matters of equitable distribution as on modes of production. Not all that long ago economic policy was as much about fairness as it was about efficiency.

For the four perspectives to work effectively, this one needs to remember itself. In other words, to take back its distributive oversight.

In focusing on fiscal management and 'wealth creation', economic policy makers have renounced their responsibility to overseeing the equitable distribution of wealth – of furthering commonwealth.

EQUITY should be this dimension's watchword.

THE FOURTH DIMENSION concerns the creation, distribution and maintenance of IDEAS – the PURPOSE of the actions we take. This is the Cultural Perspective.

The key public function within this dimension is PLANNING; after all, what is planning other than imagining a future - where do we want to go? And the key social function is ANIMATION.

Why 'animation', rather than, for example, authenticity or virtue or diversity? Because no matter how commendable the values of a society may be, they amount to nothing if the society lacks life, vitality, dynamism and democratic public discourse. After all,

- Culture springs, first and foremost, from human interaction—the tangible products of these interactions, no matter how wonderful, are ultimately secondary to the daily exchanges between people.
- Making culture is a daily public event—not just in schools, in the media, in the 'culture houses', but also in the streets, plazas, shops, trains and cafes.
- By our behaviour are we known—this never-ending public process is a society's signature.

Which is to say that a healthy society has a healthy culture and health is meaningless in the absence of life.

It is the case that cultural policies have proliferated in the last thirty years. But this is a very different manifestation than the integrated cultural perspective for which I am arguing.

And anyway, the fact that policies entitled 'cultural' usually fail to address the most significant areas of cultural production, that is, education and communications, inevitably renders incoherent any claim about the important function of culture in our society.



It is equally unfortunate that, not only are these cultural policies de facto arts policies (or arts and heritage policies) but they are also BAD arts policies.

Bad because, by and large, they focus almost entirely on supporting the activities of professional artists and developing audiences and markets for their products. There is little understanding of a role for the State in recognising and nurturing the productive and creative capacities of ordinary people.

These policies reinforce the notion of artistic (and cultural) production as a specialist function to be undertaken by professional producers while relegating the rest of us to being consumers of their artefacts (and the policy-makers even have the gall to call this consumption 'participation').

They also reinforce the treatment of art-making as commodity production; that is, seeing the 'outcome' of art being the purchase of an object (be it theatre ticket, book or picture). Thereby ignoring the values of art-making embedded in the creative processes and the rights of ALL to engage in these processes; not to mention the social benefits that would accrue.

And, as well as being bad arts policy, these cultural policies undermine the potential to get culture on to the agenda in a meaningful way. That is, to be able, as a normal and regular activity, to interrogate ALL public plans and actions from a cultural perspective: to ask how every policy impacts on the vitality of ALL citizens and their children.

In moving beyond a focus on professional arts production, this view allows the cultural perspective to facilitate the democratic generation and expression of society's values and aspirations through creative participation.

VITALITY is the watchword of this dimension.

Culture is not a pile of artefacts—it is us; the living, breathing sum of us. A sustainable society depends upon a sustainable culture. If a society's culture disintegrates, so will everything else. Vitality is the single most important characteristic of a sustainable culture.

In a vital society, the meaning we make of our lives is something we do together and continually, not an activity to be left to others, no matter how skilled, or representative, they may claim to be. Hiring experts is OK for getting the plumbing fixed, but not for establishing one's identity.

This then is my small contribution to the methodology of public planning. It is a proposal that ALL policy be developed and evaluated from four perspectives.

It is NOT an argument against the development of specific policy for specific areas. We need arts policies, heritage policies, library policies, media policies. BUT we also need to examine ALL policies as to their impact on our environment, our society, our economy and our culture.

I am simply suggesting two things:

- that the values inherent in the ways that the triple bottom line is currently envisaged need to be re-articulated; and,
- that we normalise a process of cultural evaluation that stands alongside the environmental, the social and the economic.

As it is the area with which I am most familiar, and with which I believe you are most interested, I will now speak about the Cultural Dimension in more detail.

To interrogate all policy as to its cultural impact requires the framing of a further set of questions. I believe that there are three areas in which levels, processes, and results need to be evaluated:

- **Active participation:** assessment should observe the extent of active and universal engagement in the expression of commonly and publicly negotiated aspirations.
- **Diverse authenticity:** assessment processes should highlight the extent to which a policy is derived from expressions that genuinely reflect the democratic discourse through which these were arrived at, and the extent to which it reflects the inevitable diversity inherent in all communities.
- **Continuing engagement:** the extent to which a policy develops conditions that enhance communities' capacity for ongoing action and interaction in public life should be an integral aspect of assessment.

To normalise the examination of all policy according to these criteria would be an effective way of consciously encouraging cultural vitality to stand alongside environmental respect, social inclusivity and economic equity as 'the four pillars of sustainability'.

For governments wishing to enhance their capacity to re-engage with their constituencies and to support the development of resilient communities, applying a cultural perspective is a way to encourage all its activities to positively impact on these objectives.

There is a range of specific benefits to government that can derive from the adoption of a cultural perspective within their planning processes. A cultural perspective:

- Identifies the aspirations and values of communities as being at the foundation of society;
- Opens a pathway for the active voices of communities to be heard;
- Facilitates the processes used to discuss our futures, evaluate our pasts, and act in the present;
- Provides the intellectual tools with which contemporary planning concepts can be integrated;
- Improves the theoretical planning model;
- Improves the capacity for public expression to affect planning processes;
- Improves the integration of public program management.

So far, I have spoken about public planning models and how a cultural dimension can improve these models. In a moment, I will talk about the function that the arts play in our lives and the ways that governments can best serve the creative needs of their citizens and simultaneously help to achieve healthier and more inclusive communities.

But first, it will be useful to examine some of the issues that surround the concepts of engagement and participation. Perhaps you do not need to be reminded that these observations arise out of my Australian experience. It is likely that your experience will be entirely different. I can only hope that there are sufficient parallels to make my discourse useful to you.

I'm convinced that it is both possible and necessary to evaluate engagement qualitatively as well as quantitatively. But to do this we need to be able to give the idea of engagement a more useful meaning than the fuzzy one it has now.

This is not as easy as might first appear. I will illustrate by examining another, related, and equally fuzzy buzz-word – participation.

A few years ago, our State government (in Victoria, Australia) launched its new arts policy, 'Creative Capacity+'.

The local liberal broadsheet, reporting on the policy the following day, appended 37 column centimetres of editorial to a photo twice the size of the copy. Fair enough, a picture can often tell the story much more effectively than words. And in this case, the editors got it exactly right: the picture was of 11 schoolgirls looking, across a fence, at 3 very old skeletons.

This, to announce a policy that's first goal is 'Arts for all Victorians: A Culture of Participation'. Looking at bones from behind a fence was judged as an appropriate image to illustrate participation. In a brochure entitled 'Arts Count' that accompanied the policy document, we were told that 68.3% of Victorians have been to the movies, 37.5% have been to a library and so on. It turns out that statistics like this are the measure of participation.

One wonders whether the number of people who attend football games would be seriously accepted as a measure of participation in sport. Yet this is exactly what's happening in the arts and heritage sector in my home. What's more, even before our Premier launched the policy proper, he took time out to tell us that the admission price to the Melbourne Museum was to be reduced – and that this was an absolute indication of the government's commitment to participation.

Let us imagine for a moment the Minister for Sport proclaiming the cornerstone of a new sports policy as being a reduced admission price to the Museum of Sport. It wouldn't happen.

How is it that we know exactly what it means to participate in sport, but get totally confused when we use the same word to describe our relationship to other cultural activities?

I am not using this example to denigrate the function of cultural institutions like museums. We need keeping places. And, as far as I'm concerned, as public services, they should be able to offer free access to the citizenry. What I'm questioning is how the concept of participation is being applied.

Twenty years ago, 'participation and access' were key concepts in the development of public planning. After more than a decade in the cellar, they are now re-emerging as support terms for this year's key concepts, 'engagement' and 'capacity'.

There was a time when participation and access were ideas with widely agreed meanings. These meanings, for better or worse, have stayed in the cellar.

At least in the public rhetoric of 'The Arts & Culture', current usage displays both a counter-productively broad definition and a reduced appreciation of the need to distinguish more relevantly between types of engagement. For example, museum attendances are referred to as 'participation rates'. Reading a catalogue is participation. Buying a postcard in the gallery shop is participation. Being a volunteer attendant is participation. Experiencing an interactive exhibit is participation. Being part of a reference group is participation. Actively contributing to the content of an exhibition is participation.

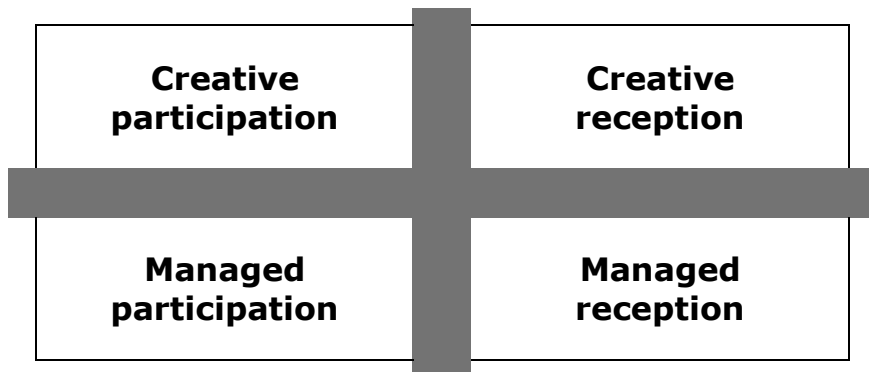
Being able to analyse the cultural significance of types of engagement is severely restricted when they are lumped into categories so wide that critically different activities all appear as one. This is not a very useful way of looking at the world.

As an alternative, I have developed a framework that I believe makes sense of engagement; one that makes it easier to recognise key engagement factors and that can then usefully inform strategy development and program design.

I suggest that all the afore-mentioned 'participations' are all types of engagement: some are about making culture, some about ingesting it; some are more creative than others.

Being able to distinguish between them is necessary because their differences are profound – both in essence and, as important from a policy-making perspective, in their resource needs, their social impact and in the application of sustainability strategies. All these various types of engagement require different approaches.

**Maximum engagement**



**Minimum engagement**

**Figure 2: Modes of Engagement**

There are two streams of cultural engagement: participation and reception, producing and consuming, breathing out and breathing in; we make culture, culture makes us.

These streams run constantly in both directions: in our daily lives they are always in dialogue, eddying around in our consciousness: we talk, we listen; we make, we learn; we show, we watch. A large part of life is the rhythm of movement between one mode and the other, of often being in both at once.

Nevertheless, envisaging them as distinct functions is both reasonable and useful.

Across this spectrum from production to consumption, our imagination engages at shifting levels of intensity. To the most intense, we apply the term 'creative'; to the least, the term 'managed'. This is the second axis.

Both participation and reception can be creative; both can be managed.

This framework offers a simple way of visualising the varying, but related, modes of engagement with cultural action.

It shows a horizontal distinction between the two modes of engagement: we make culture (participation) and culture makes us (reception).

Then there is a vertical distinction that can be made on the basis of creative intensity. The apex is maximum empowered, active and direct creativity, in sharp focus. The base is a directed and mediated engagement with little control in the hands of the engaged (apart from passive choice – and sometimes even that is missing) and little imaginative stimulation.

These splits create quadrants that combine to provide a reasonably comprehensive, realistic and simple way of approaching cultural engagement; it's built on an analysis

of what actually happens in the world, it appears (at least to me) to meaningfully reflect real-world events, it offers interesting measurement possibilities; it identifies the mode in which maximum engagement is possible. All these, particularly the last, should make it a very useful planning and evaluation tool.

The grey areas separating, or joining, the quadrants symbolise the overlaps, simultaneities and constant transformations between the modes.

Obviously, I'm arguing for policy makers and program designers to be always looking to find ways for the communities they serve to engage in the upper left quadrant.

For it is in this quadrant, that of creative participation, that the most profound engagement occurs. It is in this mode that citizens truly become citizens: that their actions, in concert with their peers, make sense of their world.

And it is in this quadrant that the concept of participatory arts comes into play. This phrase is used, in English, to describe empowered and hands-on community involvement in the process of making the symbols that express the values of the participants. Its practice embodies the principle that we are all creative and that we all have the need, the right, the capacity, and the responsibility to be actively involved in making our own culture. And that if we don't, it is inevitable that we will become alienated, disconnected and angry.

These principles are not just ones that I happen to believe in as a matter of faith. My practical background is in the performing arts; my political background is in the movements of the sixties that celebrated direct democracy.

These two aspects of my experience led me into and through many years of collaborative theatre work in which my partners and I struggled, usually successfully, to make work that emerged from, and acknowledged, the rights, capacities, desires and needs of the participants.

Out of this experience grew some understandings:

- That art-making is both special and ordinary;
- That everyone **can** make art;
- That everyone **needs** to make art; and,
- That a society that fails to recognise and respect these needs is not only unhealthy but probably doomed.

It's all very well to know these things, both theoretically and experientially, but it's another matter entirely to be able to explain them in a language that makes sense to those with power.

In my country, artists have always been viewed with a certain suspicion, if not ridicule and trivialisation, and the idea that the arts would benefit from public support has only very recently emerged. And even when it did become a relatively regular, if minor, part of the public accounts, its support faced, and continues to face, constant demands that it prove its public value.

Attempts to provide this proof have focused on two of the manifestations of the arts:

- Its contribution to the economy – the arts as industry, as attracter of tourists, as urban regeneration tool, as manufacturer of value-added commodities.
- Its contribution to the achievement of social policy – the arts as a bandage to cover wounds

These 'instrumental' values have supported arguments for the need for the public support of edifices, administrative infrastructures and the subsidy of the incomes of professional experts.

Very rarely has the need to recognise, respect and support the creative activities of ordinary people ever been coherently argued, let alone acknowledged, by the power brokers.

So, along with my obsession to see culture accepted as an essential dimension to the effective development of public policy, has grown an obsession to find ways to describe the value of art: a description

- that recognises its fundamental functions; and,
- that demonstrates why its practice is an essential aspect of becoming human

The initial challenge was to express what art 'is' as distinct from what art is good for – its intrinsic value. This is what I have come up with so far:

Art-making gives humans the capacity to have rich and full lives through its two fundamental functions:

- **Art is Connective:** art-making puts us in touch with the unknown, the unconscious, the muse, the irrational, the imaginative. It is the link with the mystic, with that part of ourselves, and of others, that defies reason.
- **Art is Expressive:** art-making facilitates the outpourings of our innate creativity. It is the avenue through which we document our dreams.

Without the opportunity to make art, we are impoverished, unfulfilled and lost.

Once one has recognised these foundational values, it becomes a relatively easy matter to demonstrate that art-making is a tool with infinite applications. These include:

- **Different ways of seeing<sup>1</sup>:** making art opens us to seeing ourselves, others and the world we live in entirely new ways. The flashes of insight, lateral connections and intuitive epiphanies that come with the exercise of creativity are essential tools for discovering effective solutions to living on this planet.
- **Belonging and connectedness:** the process of making art together creates ties between people, and between people and place, that are enormously powerful, not least because the binding is at an emotional level. It comes as no surprise that sociological researchers have discovered, for example, that music is the primary medium through which young people develop their individual and social senses of identity.
- **Memory:** our sense of the past, our primary avenue to understanding and expressing our heritage, and the stimuli that activate our memories are, more often than not based in acts of creativity.
- **Communications:** the advertising industry understands better than any, just how powerful the arts can be in enhancing the effectiveness of a message.
- **Education:** educational researchers have been telling us for decades how useful creative practices can be in facilitating learning.
- **Place making:** there is perhaps no better example than Barcelona itself to demonstrate how the art of a place makes a place.

All of these 'instrumental' functions stem from art's intrinsic values: its capacity to make inspirational connections and its power to embody awesome expressions.

Perhaps this exposition may be useful in demonstrating to the engineers and the accountants that art-making has a more important function than simply being the

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<sup>1</sup> I added this value after the speech was made as a response to a question from Jude Bloomfield, Associate of the International Cultural Planning & Policy Unit, De Montfort University.

decoration that, if one has any time and money left, one might allow to be added after the really important issues had been dealt with.

But, even if an acceptance of the profound importance of art-making was embraced by those with the capacity to do anything about it, what should and could they do?

Critical to doing anything, is rethinking public support for the arts.

In Australia, which inherited its funding methodologies from Western Europe, arts support, in order of magnitude, looks like this:

- 1. Storage buildings (museums, libraries and galleries)
- 2. Presentation buildings
- 3. Wages of managers
- 4. Training of aspiring professionals
- 5. Professional production
- 6. 'Audience development'
- and 7. right down the bottom, so small it's barely visible, arts activities by communities

There's no need for me to go into **why** funding distribution follows this pattern in most countries. More important is to demonstrate why this pattern is unsustainable, counter-productive, and topsy-turvy.

First, this system institutionalises and bureaucratises art-making.

Second, it reinforces an 'industry' model, in particular viewing art as product (commodity) and emphasising a distinction between expert producers and (hopefully) voracious consumers.

Third, it pays no heed to the right, need, desire and capacity of ordinary people to make art, nor to the function of this process in the enhancement of public health.

An analysis of arts policy priorities, based on an appreciation of the values I have outlined would, I believe, result in an order of importance almost the exact reverse of current practice; thus:

- 1. Community practices
- 2. Vocational training
- 3. Professional practice (professional art-making)
- 4. Transmission (that is, distribution and presentation)
- 5. Conservation (that is, heritage animation)

By proposing this order, I am not suggesting that conservation is not important, nor that the levels of investment made in this area should be reduced. I am simply saying that an ARTS policy should be primarily about MAKING art.

As I have said earlier, we also need heritage policies, communication policies, education policies. Within these policies, the extraordinarily valuable function of, for example, libraries and museums, deserves the closest attention.

And, of course, these policies should also be subject to regular interrogation from the cultural perspective I propose, just as should ALL policy.

Continuing with this utopian fantasy, how might the custodians of public culture respond to these new priorities, and, in particular, how might they go about enhancing and stimulating community-based practice?

First, by recognising and honouring it.

Second, by building community-based capacity.

Third, by providing the infrastructure that will allow it to thrive.

You may recall that I began by dedicating this speech to Josep Anselm Clavé and Lluís Millet.

Under the motto 'Progress, Virtue and Love', Clavé founded his first workingmen's choir, La Fraternitat, in 1850. Millett founded the Orfeo Catala in 1891. These two initiatives have not only survived to this day but have proliferated, thrived and expanded into community-based social movements whose activities extend into every aspect of community life. Both men understood that singing together is fundamental to the development of community identity.

As far as I am aware, Catalan community singing is healthier than anywhere in the world. Besides being convinced that is the reason that Catalonia has been so successful in its development of citizen participation, it also happens to be very similar to the work I do in Australia (when not writing papers about the Fourth Pillar) and for exactly the same reasons.

These days, I am very fortunate. After many years of promulgating theories that connect community development and community art, I am now deeply engaged in a practice that is totally focused on empowering people to become collaboratively creative. And to do so, not just because it is a joyful and fulfilling activity, but because it is fundamental to our capacity to live together.

The work that I do now, which is to train community members to set up and run singing groups in their communities is based on the belief that society should actively encourage, facilitate and promote singing among its citizens and their children because:

- music carries our culture - our memories, stories, identities, values and hopes;
- when people lose their music they lose their voice, and often their sense of connection to the society they live in;
- when people make music together they transcend the differences that divide; and,
- through music we can restore the practices of the everyday arts that fulfil the basic human needs for free and creative expression, connectedness and participation - and music-making is an everyday art that does this, particularly in groups;

Making music together creates a crucible in which people can experience and productively channel the synergy that comes from collaborative effort. It provides an immediate and tangible manifestation of the power and joy of co-operation. It is the creative manifestation of community. It transforms the metaphor of harmony into a real life experience. It is always a creative act, in the moment - a practice of the 'everyday arts' as an integral part of ordinary people's daily lives.

Healthy and creative communities depend on there being regular opportunities for citizens and their children to come together in safe and supportive environments in which mutual respect and validation, co-operative interaction, creative stimulation and joyful outcomes are the normal conditions and result of engagement.

Community music making offers a highly productive context in which these conditions can be realised and where community vitality, capacity, confidence and energy can flourish. It can also create community where there was none and can engage the untrained in instant, positive experience that moves them from being spectators to participants.

As I understand it, Clavé and Millett subscribed to very similar beliefs.



And it is at this point that I think that my thoughts and the themes of this conference may intersect. As I understand it, you will be examining ways of enhancing community cultures, and ways of exploring cultural avenues towards the development of active engagement in public life by those segments of your societies that, for whatever reasons, find themselves disenfranchised or alienated.

I understand that Barcelona has experienced a growth in the number of overseas born residents from 1% to 20% over the past ten years. My information may be inaccurate but the trend is undeniable, and is happening over much of the world.

I further understand that this change presents problems for everyone:

- New arrivals often find themselves in environments that are strange and unwelcoming;
- Long term residents find themselves rubbing shoulders with strange new cultures;
- Local governments find themselves caught in the middle: having to service individuals and communities that have values and needs with which they are unfamiliar AND having to calm the fears of original occupants.

A great deal of sensitivity is needed to negotiate ways through a situation that has the potential to become ugly at any moment – and has done so, including in my country, on many occasions.

Everyone has lost something – their relationship to the place in which they live is very different to how it used to be. People that have lost something can become understandably angry.

Perhaps the challenge for local government is to help to transform this sense of loss, by all concerned, into a sense of something gained.

To my mind, this can only occur through the creation of environments in which creative, respectful and unthreatening mixing (both metaphorical and literal) can take place.

This brings me back to where this talk began – to my claim that there are practical activities that can catalyse (and are the roots of) a group of people's capacity and desire to become community.

And they are activities that Clavé and Millett, more than a hundred years ago, understood well.

In this age of the worship of excellence and of mass commodification, we have forgotten that through song and dance and music we forged community, we shared emotion and feelings, we touched the mystic.

We can do it again, we must do it again.

All of this may sound as if I'm spouting a simplistic version of 'All You Need is Love' (I am, after all, of the Beatles generation).

I recognise that we need shelter, healthy food, clean water, fulfilling jobs, high quality healthcare and education, protection against violence - all those things that are at the basis of the social contract, but equally, we need joy and the pleasure of sharing time, space and experience with others – not as a decorative afterthought, but as an essential component of the social contract.

One of the most famous slogans from Paris 68 was 'I don't want to be part of a revolution where I can't dance'.

A social contract that doesn't offer joy, and, in at least a small measure, immediate joy, is one that many will simply not sign up for.

At the beginning of this talk I claimed that social engagement is best 'seeded' in an environment of:

- supportive curiosity;
- unthreatening stimulation; and,
- creative co-operation.

And that there need to be rewards for this engagement that:

- are easily achievable;
- are immediately pleasurable; and,
- ideally, are only experienceable in the moment. That is, that create a desire to return, again and again, to the activity.

Last week, I witnessed mass circle dancing in the Cathedral plaza. Most of the participants were at least middle-aged and all that I could see were white.

Obviously, I was witnessing a proud and living Catalan tradition.

Our challenge today is, not only to ensure that these traditions continue to thrive, but to find, invent, or develop similar processes that can effectively cross cultures in engaging ways – that can create conditions in which difference is valorised and exchange encouraged.

Our peoples are changing, as they always have; our culture is changing, as it always has. It is not new people that endanger the cultural authenticity of particular places, but the hegemony of cultural production.

The danger is not the so-called clash of cultures, but the potential collapse into cultural quietude in the face of the marketing of the global culture. Attempts to shield our citizenry from this monster are doomed to failure – no culture has ever successfully protected itself from external influence. The only solution with any chance of success is to energetically support the culture-making of one's own people, in all their diversity.

While disconnectedness continues, the capacity of the global machine to transform us all into passive consumers of their commodities will continue to grow. The diverse cultures that exist in our places contain extraordinary potential for the development of new and exciting syntheses. It is the responsibility of public policy makers to facilitate conditions in which these exchanges can occur.

Culture is syncretic. Perhaps this is no more clear than in Spain. Spanish culture proudly exhibits its myriad of influences in its architecture, its visual arts, its music.

And this process never stops. I have listened to techno-flamenco, flamenco-punk, ambient-flamenco, electro-flamenco – all manifestations of how a vital culture adapts to external influence while maintaining its own uniqueness.

You will have noticed that I keep using song and dance examples in attempting to demonstrate how powerful the function of art is in the development of community. This is no accident, nor is it simply the result of community singing being the area in which I work.

Over the last two decades there has been an enormous amount of scientific research into the origins and function of language. A stream of this work has involved investigating the origins and function of music.

Many of the scholars engaged in this work have reached the conclusion that before humans developed language, in order to survive, they needed a way to bind the

group, to be together comfortably and productively, to know each other, to coordinate their activities, to appreciate each other's feelings.

They argue that song and dance, or what's becoming known as 'musicking', was an evolutionary adaptation that emerged because it fulfilled this survival need.

A minority of these scholars speculate that this function of music became redundant with the development of language.

This is a claim that I obviously reject. Only the most profoundly committed rationalist could possibly believe that language was such an effective communicator of emotions that it could displace music. I am confident that in the home town of Casals, there will be no disagreement.

The conclusion that I have been able to draw from this research is that making music together is not just a useful community development tool. It is the unique evolutionary characteristic of humans that allowed us to become effective social beings.

And anyway, quite practically, between cultures unfamiliar with each other's languages how better can feelings be shared than through musicking together?

I have written that perhaps our cultural rights could be expressed in one sentence:

- The right to actively participate in the social production of the values and aspirations that inform one's society.

Perhaps this could be more simply expressed:

- The right to sing and dance together

Music may not be the answer, but without music, there can be no answer.

In conclusion, you may have noticed, that my public life appears to hang around two obsessions:

- Promoting the idea that societies would be healthier and happier if there were engaging and normalised ways for members to meaningfully negotiate shared purpose and values – to make sense together
- Showing how simple collaborative processes like singing, dancing and eating are fundamental to the making of harmonious communities.

I hope that you will find some of what I have said this morning useful in your thinking over the rest of this conference.

Thank you for listening.