Challenges for local cultural development

I've been asked to write on 'challenges to local cultural development'. I'm reasonably sure that this phrase does not have universal currency. For example, I believe that it refers to activities that, in my country, the arts bureaucracies call 'community cultural development' and that, in many other anglophone countries, are simply referred to as 'community arts'. Here then is a preliminary challenge: to arrive at a common understanding of those aspects of cultural production that are rooted in, and emanate from, the experience and visions of local communities.

So, when I write of 'local cultural development', I'm referring to locally initiated, independently co-ordinated, actively participatory collaborative activities by groups of ordinary people collectively exercising their creative imaginations (which is a long-winded way of describing play, singing, story-telling, cooking, eating, dancing and the like).

Given the expected readership of this essay, I have assumed an implied suffix to the title: 'Challenges for local cultural development that face local government'. I'm also assuming that most readers will have more direct and immediate experience of working inside government bureaucracies than I, and consequently, will be able to actively contribute to dealing with these challenges. On this basis, I am adding a further suffix: 'and that local government can do something about'.

Having chosen to emphasise local government, I should say, before addressing the challenges, that local cultural development is a phenomenon that communities engage in, at various levels of intensity, as an ordinary part of being, or becoming, communities. Most of it goes on below the radar of the authorities. When governments do recognise these activities, it is not unusual for them to see only that which they directly support, and even to go so far as to implicitly claim the mantle of cultural development for themselves, as if they are actually doing it. They are not; government may facilitate, stifle, support or twist cultural development, but, except in one very specific context, government does not make culture. The exception is important because it in this very arena that practical challenges emerge, and is therefore a situation that government can effectively act on.

This is where I will get to, but let's take in the bigger picture first.

Our planet faces significant threats, not only to the continuing welfare of the human species, but to life in general. These threats - food and water shortages, pollution, the financial crisis, extreme weather, homelessness, unemployment, rogue viruses, refugees and other huge population movements, social inequity, species and habitat destruction, deteriorating infrastructure, soil degradation, rampant consumption of non-renewable resources, public services overload, corruption, nuclear proliferation, war – are so powerful that it is reasonable to conclude that the greatest threat to 'local cultural development' is that, in the face of impending doom, cultural development, as a concept requiring public initiative, will simply disappear. 'Fiddling while Rome burns' is an evocative image.

Accepting this point of view would be disastrous.

There seems to be general agreement that the problems we face can only be effectively met through actions developed, embraced and carried through by communities united in both understanding and determination.

Achieving this state may well be the most important challenge facing us. Top down interventions are only fully effective if they occur in a context of informed, active and broad community support. A determined leadership is important, but counter-productive if surrounded by alienated communities. Indeed, many argue that the most effective initiatives in the face of these threats would be actions 'owned' by those upon whom they impact. In apparent acceptance of this notion, widespread and enthusiastic community participation in the process of determining our collective future is a familiar objective in many governance visions. Achieving this goal should be the most important priority for governments and for the people (not least, because it is a precondition to solving all the other problems).

Local cultural development (or community cultural development, or community arts) has a profoundly important part to play in creating the conditions necessary for societies to be able to meet these challenges, that is, in reinvigorating democracy, in motivating a return to the agora.

The reason for this importance is the unique feedback that engagement in these practices offers participants. Many, if not most, social interactions (that is, outside the family, but sometimes, inside) are surrounded by not hugely uplifting emotions: fear (not least, of punishment), anger, sorrow, guilt, boredom. These are not feelings likely to inspire an enthusiastic desire to maintain engagement.

Creative activities, on the other hand, offer the unconditionally positive side of the social contract. Collaborative creative endeavour (from schoolyard games to choral singing, from drumming circles to book clubs) biologically reinforces the joy of doing things together. Without this reminder, attempts to enjoin citizenry in social action, or even social discourse (both essential in the face of global threats) become far more difficult. The memory of pleasurable experience is a much more effective stimulus to engage in collective interaction than fear of the future.

An enthusiastic willingness to engage has preconditions: confidence in the face of the unknown, confidence in the behaviour of others, confidence that one's contribution will be integrated into the whole, positive expectations, trust. And for the engagement to be fruitful, a further set: flexibility, respect for (and interest in) difference, expressiveness. Not co-incidentally, these are all capacities that can be (enjoyably and safely) learnt and exercised in collaborative creative practice.

Consequently, it makes good sense that a really effective way for these capacities to become commonly held (an essential condition for achieving sustainability) would be to encourage, honour and support widespread local creative pursuits.

This 'most important challenge facing us' has a name. It is 'the crisis of democracy', and refers to the decline of civic engagement – an increasing alienation among the population from the processes of governance. From Robert Putnam to the Animating Democracy website, the evidence is clear that effective local cultural development increases the likelihood of re-engagement in civil society. The hugely important function that active collaborative arts activities perform in the health of communities, particularly in the enhancement of trust, connectivity and willingness to co-operate with others is well documented. These experiences / feelings / consciousnesses are the essential soil in which positive dialogue and collaborative action flourish.

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In regard to local cultural development, the **first challenge** is:

- To clearly express the fundamental necessity for significant public support for the widespread proliferation of community-based participatory and collaborative creative activities;

- To clearly demonstrate that community-wide participation in these activities is an essential foundation of civic engagement and social wellbeing; and,

- To mount these arguments so well that organs of the State are inspired to act in the spirit of this understanding.

It is imperative that the State appreciates that it is **because of**, rather than **in spite of**, the dangers facing us, that we need to urgently stimulate community-based creative processes.

If a major challenge is to grow understanding then equally, there is a challenge in knowing how to best respond to this awareness. Understanding the social function of cultural activity is an essential first step; devising policies and programs informed by this knowledge is also essential.

This is the **second challenge** for local cultural development:

- To develop effective means of stimulating local cultural action – action that becomes independent, sustainable, cross-culturally respectful and attractive, welcoming …

On the face of it, this looks like a relatively simple challenge (particularly in comparison with the first) – program design and implementation is what bureaucrats do.

But, I don't think I'm being overly simplistic to view bureaucracy and creativity as 'natural' antagonists. All the classic binaries appear to sit comfortably in one camp or the other: security, risk; duty, ecstasy; order, chaos; unity, diversity; plans, dreams …

Obviously, a healthy society gracefully accommodates both poles, but for one to have to deal directly with the other invites conflict. To survive, we must learn the dance of opposites. So far, most of the learning requirements have been laid at the door of communities; but the dance won't flow without the bureaucracies coming to the party.

The values and behaviours of the facilitators of local cultural development have a significant impact on the communities with which they interact. Unless creative program design is accompanied by a creative approach to community relations and 'modes of delivery', the ensuing processes will have less positive outcomes.

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This leads me to refocus the second challenge from 'ways of doing' (good programs) to 'ways of thinking' (good behaviour); which is to say that there is an urgent need for cultural development within the agencies of government. Five years ago, I wrote:

> *Unless attitudes change, nothing else will. Unless the agents of governance are able to:*
>
> - *trust in the creative capacity of communities;*
>
> - *tangibly commit to democracy;*
>
> - *be prepared to devolve control, and*
>
> - *go beyond a service delivery model,*
>
> *we will continue to spin in unproductive, and ultimately unsustainable, circles.*

(From Understanding Culture, 28/7/03: http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/downloads/Just_Vibrant.pdf)

There have been some developments in the past half decade, but, in general, only the spin has accelerated. Having no doubt about the integrity of most public servants, I ask myself, 'What is it that limits the best of intentions?' The most sensible answer I can find is 'bureaucratic inertia' – consolidating tendencies, that, in many contexts are valuable, but in relation to creative expression, are the kiss of death.

Here are some adjectives that can be legitimately and without prejudice appended to a great deal of local cultural development: unregulated, spontaneous, improvisatory, unplanned, disordered, transitory, ephemeral, invisible, accidental, haphazard, barter-based. Understandably, interacting with this phenomenon is a bureaucrat's nightmare. Equally understandably, this bureaucrat might wish to infiltrate some order into this chaos.

I have no doubt that order has its place; my concern is with some of the more 'orderly' tendencies I have observed around my place. Tendencies that, if allowed to trundle on, will eventually strangle local cultural development. I suspect that developments like these occur in all bureaucratic environments and I have some faith that they can be resisted. A first step is to recognise the tendencies, to name them and to understand their impact. Then can begin perhaps the most important cultural development initiative open to government – its own.

In contributing to this process, I am trying to be helpful rather than accusatory. Perhaps there is an agency somewhere that exhibits extreme versions of all the tendencies I am about to describe. If so, I've never come across it. There are oceans of goodwill within bureaucracies; I'm trying to chip away at some of the dams.

The more sympathetic the agencies are, the more likely it is that the outcomes will be positive. From my observations, these are some of the tendencies within government that inhibit an effective relationship between government and communities, particularly in pursuing local cultural development objectives:

Inverted policy priorities: the tendency to focus on the outward manifestations of professional production while not recognising the need to care for the ground that supports these emanations.

The largest items of public investment in the arts are usually for the development, upkeep and management of facilities for the storage and presentation of canonic artefacts and rituals; next is usually subsidy of the industry that makes content for these facilities; third is the training of personnel for employment in these fields; and fourth is often schemes to increase consumption of the products available from these facilities. If it is there at all, the smallest item is always on the support of community-based, community-envisioned and community-implemented cultural activities.

These investment priorities make sense if cultural production is viewed through an industrial or commercial lens. But they fall apart if examined from other points of view. If culture also describes a social process, a creative process, an experience, as well as an industry that makes stuff for consumption, then some other priorities raise their heads.

To recognise that the most profound impacts of cultural endeavour come through the actual process of making, and to recognise that all people have the capacity, right, need and desire to directly experience these impacts, and to recognise that this experience has profound social benefits must surely alter, if not reverse the traditional priorities.

I don't question that witnessing the results of cultural production can be profoundly moving, but that should not divert focus from the benefits communities derive from actively making their own culture. Energetic local cultural production is the foundation of a healthy arts ecology. It is also at the foundation of much more: our sense of ourselves, our sense of each other, our collective memories, our collective problem-solving capacities, our pleasure in living. I simply do not understand how investment in local culture-making is not a top priority for any government committed to sustainability, social justice or democracy.

Assuming unity: the tendency to forget, ignore, and/or trivialise alternate traditions; to assume that a 'mainstream' culture is all encompassing.

Different histories, different perspectives and different visions are an essential element of successful problem-solving. Our survival depends on diversity.

Professionalisation: the tendency to encourage its 'clients' to adopt 'business models':

- *administrations*: affirming specialist business training at the expense of less formal ways of acquiring administrative skills, with the expectation of comprehensive reporting (see below, 'Deforestation'). An assumption that management and administration skills are universally applicable, no matter the nature of the enterprise

- *governance*: overloading Boards with business people and professionals and failing to recognise the contribution to governance that can be made by those experienced in the work

- *artists*: eligibility support being heavily loaded towards those already making a living from working in the arts, followed by 'emerging' artists with institutionally earned qualifications

Local cultural development and standard business models may not comfortably blend. The natural antagonisms I mentioned above require sensitive negotiation to produce positive outcomes.

Mystification: the tendency to elevate notions of 'talent' and 'excellence' to heights that can be scaled only by a select few.

The democratisation of creativity should be a key aim in the intent of government, and in particular, local government.

Institutionalisation: the tendency to distribute most resources through established bodies (usually already beneficiaries of State support and often completely dependent on and responsible to the State)

Mediating interventions through entities that are State influenced (and often controlled) may be efficient, may assist the entities to justify their existence (or at least improve their rationale for further State support), may facilitate the State's capacity to oversee programs BUT needs to be balanced against the likely benefits of fostering community control of the resources they need.

Doppleganger syndrome: the tendency to encourage the emergence of management teams within agency 'client groups' that have values and behaviours similar to those of the agency personnel.

Negotiations are always more efficient when both sides of the table share values and behaviours. But conclusions reached in this manner, and particularly in this context, have a tendency not to stick. Mediations with representatives trained to see things the same way as the agency may yield apparently positive short-term results, but mitigate against the development of genuine trust and understanding between the parties. Respectfully acknowledging difference and equitably negotiating shared agreement are skills dependent on experientially-based understanding of and positive response to the values and behaviours of the communities with which engagement is desired.

Gatekeeping: the tendency to use 'no' as the default response.

Community interactions with government need not be tests, score cards, examinations to pass or fail, competitions, exercises in matching community desire to government criteria. The ways of social conversation need to be looked at again. Just as local cultural production aims to be inclusive, welcoming, non-threatening, supportive and enjoyable, so should those responsible for its facilitation strive to embody these values in their dealings. No matter what the public rhetoric may be, agency behaviour sends the strongest message.

Faddism: the tendency to leap on bandwagons and to believe that appropriating the latest planning fashion will lead to the fond embrace of the powerful (for example, urban regeneration, the creative class, innovation, sustainability, social cohesion, inclusivity)

Creative expression is a public good, a fundamental human right and need, an essential survival tool, an essential element in developing our social capacities. This is why the State should do all in its power to ensure its widespread exercise across and between all communities. Exploring how creative expression can be utilised in the achievement of a range of public objectives is well worth doing, but it should not divert focus from these essential elements.

Inarticulateness: the tendency to lack clarity, confidence or enthusiasm in expressing the reasons why:

- community art is a foundation for civic engagement; and
- public support of local cultural initiative is essential.

I suspect that many bureaucrats share the common suspicion that art (and even more so, community art) is really just decoration that should only be thought about after the real issues have been dealt with (or at least that they suspect that their colleagues and superiors are of this opinion). The consequence is that a great deal of government rhetoric on cultural development lacks a confident and grounded demonstration of what is at stake. Instead of bold clarity we get desperate and defensive rationales, new age sentimentality, aggressively enthusiastic corporate speak, dull bureaucratese, unsupportable quality of life claims and cries for the preservation of ancient rituals. And I haven't come across any poetry. It is little wonder that local cultural development remains relatively invisible.

Deafness: the tendency not to listen to the communities they serve.

Listening is a skill (and it needs to be exercised over a variety of media – see below, 'Guttenberg rules') and being seen to listen is also a skill. Appearing to listen is a quality familiar to most communities. Really listening is a dynamic process; it demands responses that show real engagement with the matter at hand. That is, discourse, preferably public discourse; and not lectures or presentations from external specialists with formal question time but community gatherings where dialogue and celebration intertwine.

Distrust: the tendency to muffle the voices of their communities.

Trust, honour, valorisation, respect and confidence building are perhaps the most valuable contributions that agencies can make to the communities they serve.

Commodification: the tendency to regard the sole legitimate outcome of cultural activities as being things that can be marketed to consumers; AND to tacitly assume that it is socially healthy to support a small class of producers to make these commodities for general consumption. Indeed, it is not uncommon for increased consumption to be used as an indicator of cultural development.

It is in **making** art (or play) together that the most profound benefits emerge. The manifestations of these processes (objects or events to be viewed) are obviously valuable, but perform different and yes, less socially useful, functions.

Excellent public manifestations: the tendency to pressure implementers of State-supported activities to climax their work with public spectacles that conform to complex artistic standards.

Many cultural endeavours involve climaxes and it is perfectly reasonable that these be engaged with on that basis. But a lot else is sporadic and intermittent or, even more difficult, repetitive, periodic, undulating. These processes, more often than not, don't produce events or objects for public display and/or sale. Nevertheless they are an essential part of local cultural development. And when they do produce public outcomes, it is entirely inappropriate that they be subjected to the same criteria as is usually applied to 'professional' output. Indeed, if evaluation is useful, in the case of local cultural endeavour, it is the processes before, during and after the public manifestation and the impact of that experience on the participants that would be worth examining.

Encouraging dependence: the tendency to assume that the only cultural activities going on are those supported by the authorities (at least, the only activities of value) and to encourage communities to assume the same; to further assume that the only valuable things that **can** happen are those emerging from government initiative.

A fundamental characteristic of sustainable local cultural activity is that it is initiated, designed, controlled, implemented, managed and owned by local communities. It is also the case that sustenance comes from both inside and outside the community itself. No micro eco-system can be entirely self-sustaining. The delivery of external sustenance (in this case, government support) is, quite properly, surrounded by a web of mutual rights and responsibilities. In too many situations it is the rights of government and the responsibilities of communities that receive the most attention, rather than vice-versa.

Singular events: the tendency to support activities within extremely limited time-spans.

From an entirely practical perspective, I am convinced that the most useful initiatives in local cultural development will be those that take a systemic approach.   If the State were able to engage with communities around issues like coalition building, networking, and skill development, exciting programs might emerge.

Observation: the tendency to avoid real participation - as a lifestyle, a professional practice and as a way of measuring impact.

Collaborative and creative participation in creative activities can be enormous fun. I think that we would be in a better place if every individual responsible for local cultural development knew how joyous it could be through personal experience. These same activities can also improve workplaces: enhancing productivity, team building, problem-solving and more. As someone approaching a bureaucracy, I would feel a lot more comfortable and confident if I knew that those I was dealing with experienced local cultural development practices in their workplace. And then there is the application of the term 'participation' in the statistics industry. In sports statistics, participation usually refers to the numbers on the field. In arts statistics, it usually refers to the numbers in the grandstand. Just as with sport, actually doing it is where the primary benefits are found.

Forgetting the young: the tendency to focus on 'adult' cultural production.

All human attributes flower more prolifically with exercise and validation. Unless this happens regularly through childhood, adolescence and youth, the desire will diminish (or spill out in unproductive forms) and the capacities will atrophy. It may be needless to say that the impact of this will be dreadful.

Guttenberg rules: the tendency to overlook new (and old) mediums

Communications from bureaucracies to communities (particularly those seeking information and opinion) tend to be based in print culture, and they tend to require quasi-numerate responses, not least because statistical methods of gauging public opinion are based on aggregates of individual responses that have been symbolised as numbers. This method of reaching an understanding of community opinions in itself mitigates against a genuine community opinion being reached. In the context of meetings, calling an anonymous straw vote is a standard way of curtailing discussion. Opinion polls are exactly the same thing. This dependence on a very limited spectrum of communication tools deprives all parties from the insights and pleasures that may be experienced while interacting in other mediums (whether they be story-telling, or song, or poetry, or image). Lost also is the process of publicly negotiated inclusive opinions that express commonly owned positions. There are arguments that there are now cyber pathways on which public discourse can be mediated and many bureaucracies are utilising them. I think the jury is still out on their efficacy and that we are not so far removed from our origins that the gathering around the fire to eat, dance, sing and decide on tomorrow's work is still the most effective way of rediscovering civic engagement.

Being serious: the tendency to take everything (including themselves) too seriously.

Play is a fundamental part of creativity, art and culture. Many of those that are responsible for the State's contribution need a dose.

Deforestation: the tendency to suffocate 'clients' in mountains of paperwork.

One very successful way to integrate the cultural industry into the machinery of government is to insist on detailed and complex plans and reports. Apart from anything else, this creates a class within the 'local cultural development sector' of specialists in interfacing with government (in my country this serves as a training ground for government employees). This specialist group effectively becomes the face of the community to the bureaucracy and the face of the bureaucracy to the community. Along with this export of methodology comes an inevitable shift in focus: increasing proportions of resources are directed towards these obligatory functions and those who do the work become increasingly influential. Meanwhile the real work sometimes becomes just the excuse for maintaining the functionaries.

Prisoners of Treasury: the tendency to accept the supremacy of economic priorities.

Financial considerations are important but they don't merit the singular bottom-line credibility they are currently accorded. Working towards being able to symbolise elements of social and environmental transactions as acceptable financial items is a worthy enterprise but it also reinforces the primacy of economics. Determining effective local cultural development requires evaluation from multi-dimensional perspectives. The questions that need answers include, but go far beyond, cost-benefit.

Ossification: the tendency to passively accommodate the inevitable inertia of bureaucratic culture.

Cultural development within bureaucracies may be as important to local cultural development as any other imaginable initiative. The developer of policy, the implementer of programs, the curator of public resources, the epitome of socially responsible behaviour is the holder of considerable power. However that power is exercised, it will have profound effects.

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I have no doubt that the cultural activities of local communities can be hugely energised with sustenance from local authorities. On the other hand, they can often (sometimes with the best of intentions) be severely inhibited.

This critical relationship between local government and local cultural development means that actively resisting the tendencies described above is in the interests of many (if not all) people; not least, elected local officials, local government staff and local cultural activists.

There is also a challenge for those active in and/or responsible for 'cultural development' generally (that is, with different perspectives than local). It is to appreciate and respond positively to the importance of **local** cultural activities, not only as a critical contributor to a reinvigoration of civic engagement (itself a necessary basis for facing global challenges) but also as being the soil upon which 'higher order' culture depends.

It may not be too much of an overstatement to claim that resisting these tendencies is not just an essential priority for local cultural development but for saving the planet.

Certainly, a key area of cultural development at the local level is **within** the agencies responsible for facilitating cultural development. Without change within these agencies, their capacity to productively assist communities to develop their cultures will be inhibited.

So, to re-state the 'challenges to local cultural development that face local government and that local government can do something about':

The **first challenge** is unawareness, and the response should be learning and advocacy.

  A society's health and capacity to effectively respond to change is fundamentally dependent on the energetic engagement of its people. This can be encouraged, focussed and maintained by supporting local cultural development.

  This argument needs to be understood and promoted.

The **second challenge** is insensitivity, and the response should be listening and self-examination.

  The values and behaviours that surround State interventions significantly affect their impact. Particularly in the area of local cultural development, the way that State agents choose to engage with the communities they serve will profoundly affect what happens.

  Counter-productive tendencies need to be identified and worked on.

Government may be the biggest threat to local cultural development, but it is also its greatest hope. State-supported creative approaches to facilitating local cultural development have the potential to take us many steps toward resolving the crisis we are in.

How can this threat be transformed into hope? How can a creative approach to local cultural development be achieved? What might 'learning and advocacy' and 'listening and self-examination' initiatives look like? What is to be done?

I believe change is necessary at two levels – in the values and behaviour of those at the senior levels of the agencies of public support for culture, and in the ways that communities go about dealing with these agencies. In the latter case, I won't make proposals, partly because it would be inappropriate in relation to the readership of this essay, but more important, because, for these changes to stick, they will need to be internally generated.

Suffice it to say that I look forward to the growing confidence within communities concerning their rights to cultural expression.

So, to the first of my proposed change sites – within the public agencies; as I have said, there is a lot of learning to be done:

- Professional development of:
  - **Sympathetic ears**: The art of 'really' listening and the exploration of alternate ways of facilitating community expression
  - **Golden tongues**: The art of saying what one means in ways that strike responsive chords with the listeners – what might be called accessible expression
  - **Soft hands**: The art of service as opposed to control; how to 'let go', how to trust in the capacities of communities
  - **Enquiring minds**: The art of respectful curiosity – how to stay open to surprise, how to develop an appreciation, and capacity to express, the eternal synthesis between diverse cultures as they rub against each other
  - **Dancing feet**: The art of facilitating community initiative – how to lead without threat, how to recognise and honour emerging and half-formed visions
- The design and application of internal procedures that enhance staff contribution to agency culture
- The design and application of internal procedures that enhance staff engagement in collaborative creativity
- The design of regular community gatherings at which communities can creatively mingle, engage in visionary discourse, celebrate their existence and be fruitfully listened to by the agencies responsible for facilitating their self-directed development.

This may appear to be a paltry contribution in the face of the problems I have identified, but ultimately the solutions are in the hands of the agencies – see things differently and the solutions will emerge. What I am proposing here is a different perspective.

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What I have been trying to do is clear the decks; to suggest how to go about creating the conditions in which government **action** has a good chance of being effective, and to emphasise that unless these conditions are achieved, it is unlikely that actions will be usefully productive.

Once awareness and sensitivity are developed, then it is possible to confidently consider what government might do to directly support 'locally initiated, independently co-ordinated, actively participatory collaborative activities by groups of ordinary people collectively exercising their creative imaginations' – that is, local cultural development.

Digressing for a moment, I did not originally intend to include this section in this essay. I felt that the challenges I had identified were more than enough to occupy most governance bodies and their agents for a considerable time. I also feared that if I included speculative 'post-development' options, it would be tempting to skip the 'consciousness' issues and leap straight to the 'operational' (a common tendency in bureaucracies).

While I remain ambivalent about continuing, I am aware that this essay is part of a collection suggesting actions over a quite extended period. In this context, **and** in the context that the initial challenges will have at least been faced, if not overcome, I suggest that local cultural development be based on:

Devolving the tools of engagement

Creative participation is the key to cultural vitality and the key to universal creative participation is **access**. I don't mean access to products and services (what could be called passive access) but access to the tools of production and the levers of power (that is, active access).

What are these tools?

For communities to achieve maximum engagement in creative participation, they need widespread and easy access to:

- **Recognition**: public recognition and promotion of the value of their activities and the importance of their status; confidence in their cultural function and the public support for carrying out that function.
- **Time**: there are many options; for example – a shorter working week, mandatory arts elements in educational programs, paid time for cultural activities as a part of workplace agreements, a recognition that time spent in creative activity is socially productive.
- **Networks**: of common interest and experience, of support and sharing – networks that facilitate discovery, exchange, dissemination and promotion; while these networks need to be independent, their development would benefit from, for example, the availability of training opportunities for community activists and the facilitation of co-operative resource sharing.
- **Information**: about examples and models, guidelines to best practice, contact details, exposure to alternatives.
- **Equipment**: the tangible materials and tools with which to make stuff.
- **Sites**: in which to work, to practice, to mingle, to play, to experiment, to make and to show.
- **Public space**: places where widespread face-to-face social interaction can be facilitated. This is a key to civic engagement and to local cultural development.
- **Facilitation**: people who are really good at liberating the creativity of others.
- **Skill development**: decentralised and local ownership of an ongoing skill-base; keeping in mind that the fundamental skill is CONFIDENCE and that development is the opposite of envelopment. The skills I'm thinking of are not just those of specific art-making techniques but also of group-work and cross-cultural facilitation.
- **Diversity**: opportunities to experience and collaborate with people with different experiences, values and modes of expression.
- **Continuity**: 'access to continuity' may sound strange, but it is meaningful; communities need to be able to experience **ongoing** cultural engagement – stop-start projects can be counter-productive.
- **Gentle hands**: resource and service providers whose behaviour is founded on their understanding that their function is to serve rather than control.
- **Money**: although, if all of the foregoing resources were available to communities at a minimal cost to them, then perhaps money wouldn't be an issue at all.

Most communities could not hope to achieve accessibility like this on their own: interventions are clearly needed.

The challenge for agents of governance is to ensure that the distribution of these resources is achieved in ways that make them accessible, productively used and, as far as possible, locally owned and sustainable.

If the tools of cultural production were to become universally accessible, the results would not simply be the universal and democratic exercise of cultural rights, but also a massive outburst of creativity.

Once again, I have avoided offering a practical step-by-step program for government initiative in local cultural development; I have also not described real examples of successful initiatives. The overriding reason for this is my conviction that the best way to develop good program is through dialogue with those who will make use of it.

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Finally, if all of the above appears to be just fine sounding sentiment with little possibility of practical application, a comparison between 'the arts' and sport (another important local cultural activity) may help to demonstrate that we already have the capacity to apply different approaches.

Sport, like the arts, has a professional and commercial aspect and is also an activity that continues to be practised by everyday people as a standard part of their lives. But, even though, like the arts, sport has been stratified and mystified, its 'lower' ranks have not been trivialised (as has occurred in the arts). Although there are superstar elites, this hasn't negated the general recognition of the value and contribution of the everyday, in-community end of the spectrum.

Public perception of sport, while acknowledging, indeed worshipping, the divine athlete, still includes recognition:

- of the health promotion function of physical activity, and of the co-operative values inherent in sports activities (particularly team sports)
- that community sport neither is, nor needs to be (indeed would suffer from becoming) a public performance ('spectator sport')
- that 'participation' statistics count those on the field, **not** those watching
- of the connection between community sports activities and commercially necessary/viable fan bases (direct participation in the activity consolidates appreciation of the wunderkind)
- of the social function and responsibilities of the stars in promoting widespread and active involvement
- of the need for the public provision of facilities for community use
- of the need for training courses for community sports co-ordinators
- of the need for the **activity** to be an integral part of the education process (rather than just its appreciation or vocationally directed programs)

If this sort of awareness informed the way that public arts policies were developed, we would be a lot closer to rediscovering, and being able to genuinely celebrate, the essential function that the arts play in supporting a healthy and connected society.

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