Governance and Engagement

11/7/03   Jon Hawkes

Address to the City of Port Phillip symposium, 'Beyond Cultural Policy'.

Even though we are now into the second day of this symposium, and my initial instructions were to talk about governance and engagement (which I still intend to do), I think that a useful way into these ideas may be to recap how we got to be where we are today.

At the outset, I should say that much of what I am about to cover has been expressed in more powerful ways by many of yesterday's speakers, in particular Donald Horne and June Moorhouse. Nevertheless, as Stacey advised, I will persevere.

Local governments have been developing cultural policies for at least two decades. The fact is, most of these have been arts policies, which, in itself is not a bad thing, except that, by calling them cultural policies, public servants have deprived themselves of an exceptionally useful tool in their planning kits.

It was this realisation that motivated me to write 'The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability'.

In this small volume, I use 'culture' in what is known as its 'anthropological' sense (in fact, it is also the sense in which it is used in the 1996 UNESCO Declaration of Cultural Rights). From this perspective, the concept 'culture' is used to describe, as Donald has already explained:

- our values and aspirations;

- the ways we develop, receive and transmit these values, and

- the ways of life these processes produce.

This usage of 'culture' can be summarised as 'the social production of meaning', or simply 'making sense'.

And I think, that of all the things we make, 'sense' is the most important; and that we need to recognise and facilitate this process in the ways we organise our society.

The fact that current planning tools contained no mechanisms that facilitated ongoing, regular and accessible ways of connecting the generation, expression and influence of community values and aspirations to the development and evaluation of public planning led me to call for the addition of a fourth, cultural, perspective to the standard traingle of social, environmental and economic 'pillars'.

Not least because it is through cultural action:

- that we make sense of our existence and the environment we inhabit;

- that we find common expressions of our values and needs, and

- that we meet the challenges presented by our continuing stewardship of the planet.

Without culture, we are, quite literally, not human.

And a system of governance that lacks an integrated cultural perspective is equally bereft.

In early 2001, The Fourth Pillar was released. At the time, I hoped that the ideas I was promoting might be of some interest to local government. Never in my wildest dreams did I expect that, within two years, a prominent Council would develop the issues I had raised to the extent that Port Phillip has.

Originally, my main objective had been to get a cultural perspective onto the agenda. I didn't really put much thought into the functionality of the other three, or indeed of the comprehensiveness of the four perspectives as an integrated totality.

Shortly after publication I noticed that others were developing critiques of the triangular model as well. Amongst these, one in particular stood out for me. It was one that proposed 'governance' as a fourth perspective (and, incidentally, relegated 'cultural' to being a subset of 'social').

Now, being a political animal at heart, I recognised that governance (describing the way we organise ourselves, the nature and structure of power relations) was indeed a critical issue in any planning paradigm, and kicked myself for not having given it enough thought.

What I realised was that in obsessing on getting culture up, I had accepted the other three perspectives as given. This was very silly.

This is best illustrated by my tacit acceptance of 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 scam. It's rhetoric sounds like a profound development from the singular perspective of the economic fundamentalists but in fact, all it really is an attempt to transform social and environmental issues into economics – unless the workers and consumers are comfy, 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 in no way approaching the 'realisation of citizens' human potential' as June Moorhouse told us about yesterday evening.

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 ayatollahs of this fundamentalist cult have not only promoted the 'free market' as the basis of all human relations, they have transformed the meanings of great slabs of our vocabulary.

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.

This is such an obscenity, that I have to digress for a minute. When I mentioned to my publisher, the fabulous Judy Spokes, that I was wondering whether four perspectives were enough and that perhaps we should be considering The Planning Pentacle or The Whole-of-Government Hexagram or even The Seven Pillars of Wisdom she got understandably twitchy.

To put your minds at rest, I do think that four perspectives will do the job, and that naming them as environmental, cultural, social and economic is sensible.

However, 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 we need to do a similar job on the other three perspectives.

Rather than work backwards; that is, to start with the nominated perspectives and attempt to re-jig them, I've tried to go back to taws, to imagine what the essential planning issues are and to work from there towards a framework that is comprehensive but simple enough to be useful.

I think that it's reasonable to break down public planning into four distinct (but related) components. These can be framed as quite simple questions:

ONE: What are we starting with? OR, What have we got?

TWO: Where do we want to go? OR Why do we want to go anywhere at all?

THREE: How do we get there? OR How do we organise ourselves?

FOUR: Who benefits? OR Is everyone on board?

Question one deals with the CONTEXT in which we find ourselves; the RESOURCES we have to work with.

Question two deals with the PURPOSE of our proposed actions; the IDEAS that inform our directions.

Question three deals with the STRUCTURE through which we will implement our objectives; the decision-making processes, the distribution of POWER.

Question four deals with the PRODUCTION that will take place; the WEALTH (in its widest sense) that will be accumulated and how it will be distributed.

Do these ideas bear any resemblance to the Four Perspectives that we are currently working with?

I am confident that they do, provided that we are able to extend the narrow focuses that environmental, cultural, social and economic issues have come to refer to.

ISSUE ONE: the creation, distribution and maintenance of RESOURCES – the CONTEXT: this is the Environmental Perspective

This perspective should not simply refer to the earth's physical resources and our exploitation of them, but to the living system of which we are a part.

That is, an 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 view allows the environmental perspective to facilitate the development of a wider appreciation of the global ecological system in which we exist and upon which we are dependent.

ISSUE TWO: the creation, distribution and maintenance of IDEAS – the PURPOSE: this is the Cultural Perspective

When it is mentioned at all, 'culture' usually refers to the arts and/or the 'cultural industries', and, as such, is often viewed as a subset of social policy (despite the concerted efforts of many to have it 'upgraded' to the economic level).

The Fourth Pillar presents the arguments in support of using 'culture' as the description of that aspect of analysis that focuses on the intentions and purposes that inform our behaviour.

In moving away from 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.

ISSUE THREE: the creation, distribution and maintenance of POWER – the STRUCTURE: this is the Social Perspective

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).

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.

That is, the distribution of **power**; the processes of **governance**.

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.

ISSUE FOUR: *the creation, distribution and maintenance of WEALTH – the PRODUCTION: this is the Economic Perspective*

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, economic policy makers have renounced their
responsibility to overseeing the equitable distribution of wealth – of furthering
commonwealth.

I think the two critical matters arising out of this analysis are the pressing need for
economic thinking to re-embrace issues of fairness, equity and distribution AND for social
thinking to, once more, address issues of social structure and organisation.

With this template, governance becomes the essential element of the social perspective.

In this context it is reasonable to see the Four Perspectives as a contribution to the theory
of public administration; as another model designed to improve the facilitation of public
services. But while it certainly is that, it is also much more. To my mind, it is also an
important contribution to the project that has engrossed humankind for at least the last
three hundred years - what might be called the Democracy Project: the, probably endless,
challenge to find a way of governing ourselves that empowers and engages the entire

body politic. It is in this context that issues of governance and engagement become paramount.

Let's start with an expression of the values that underpin the democracy we wish to live in. I imagine we all share a commitment to being actively involved in the development and maintenance of a society in which all citizens are respected, engaged, empowered and fulfilled as well as healthy, housed, well-fed, safe, and informed.

The second set of goals – health, shelter, sustenance, security and education - could, at least theoretically, be achieved under any political system.

The first set of goals – respect, engagement, empowerment and fulfilment – would appear to be unique to systems that claim to be democratic.

Yet, so far, few democratic systems, and certainly not ours, have come close to achieving this first set of goals. Let alone in any sustainable fashion.

Intolerance, alienation, powerlessness and dissatisfaction have not been done away with. The democratic dream remains exactly that.

One of the chief reasons for this sorry state is that we have concentrated on achieving the second set (health, shelter, sustenance, security and education – often called the basics) in the belief that, if we get them right, then the first set (respect, engagement, empowerment and fulfillment) will inevitably follow.

This has, in fact, not happened.

This ordering of social priorities has been further skewed by the elevation of 'material prosperity' to the top of the list. We need to recognise that economic development is merely one of a number of means for achieving other goals, rather than being an end in itself.

The primacy of economic imperatives is beginning, little by little, to be eroded: Local Agenda 21, ecologically sustainable development are conceptual attempts to get our priorities into an order that reflects our democratic vision. Although, as I noted earlier, most of the energy has gone into trying to demonstrate the **economic** value of social and environmental matters, rather than demonstrating that there are other, more important values than mere economics.

And not only do we find ourselves in a society where the priorities are back to front, we're in one where the process of working out our priorities is back to front.

Last year, I attended a seminar, set up by the Victorian State Government, on community building. In reply to a question from a Councillor from a local government about what

ongoing processes existed for communities to impact on State Government policy, the senior bureaucrat on the podium responded that the ballot box was the process. Political parties present platforms and the one that most of us like becomes policy.

Ticking a box once every three years is democracy. No wonder so many of us feel alienated, powerless and dissatisfied.

The economic rationalists have packed the command economy off to the dustbin of history; it is up to us to send the command culture to the same place.

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.

Politicians have begun to bemoan the apathy of the citizenry and to promote ways of re-engaging the body politic. This rhetoric will remain exactly that until they recognise that in an engaged democracy, the ideas actually emerge from community debate, from the constant, often fractious and difficult contestation of meaning at the base. Being offered a menu of barely differentiated options from above does not encourage engagement.

So what is a useful starting point? Not surprisingly, I would suggest that having a clear idea of what is meant by engagement is the best place to begin.

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 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', 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, cinema attendances are refered to as 'participation rates'. Being a volunteer usher is participation. Reading a book is participation. Singing in a community choir is participation. Writing a play is participation. Organising a festival is participation. Buying a CD 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 yet another framework to make sense of engagement; one that makes it easier to recognise key engagement factors and that can then usefully inform strategy development.

I suggest that all the afore-mentioned 'participations' are 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 resource needs, social impact and application of sustainability strategies. All these various types of engagement require different approaches.

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.

In both streams, the fish are jumping – jolts of intuition, shocks of lateral connection, conceptual leaps that transcend rational processes, lightning strikes of illumination – creativity at play. This is the creative side of the spectrum. Yes it is electrical, yes it is stormy, yes it can be dangerous and scary and risky AND YES IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR SURVIVAL - essential not only that we cherish those who do this sort of thing all the time (commonly known as Artists), BUT ALSO THAT we **all** get used to doing it a lot. This is the creative aspect.

And in both streams, merchant vessels ply their trades (this extended metaphor appears to work). That is, agencies pursue their goals. It may be to improve public health; it may be to sell a million CDs; it may be to cheaply human resource an international sporting event; it may be to attract more customers; it may be to educate the young. This is the managed side of the spectrum. The objectives of the 'merchants' tend to direct or at least mediate the behaviour and experience of those that are being engaged. This is the managed aspect.

My 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 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 intelligent analysis of what actually happens in the world, it appears 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 gray areas separating, or joining, the quadrants symbolise the overlaps, simultaneities and constant transformations between the modes.

Even so, against these two (fuzzy) axis (participation/reception; creative intensity), every contribution to culture, every particular type of engagement can be precisely placed (that is, if one wished to).

The creative/managed axis

Creativity is an enormously difficult idea to describe, and its absence even more so.

An operational description of 'creative'

First there is nothing and then there is something. This is the creation moment. Most cultures have a creation myth, that moment when nothing became something. When we became anthropocentric, we took upon ourselves this capacity, although we have continued to suspect that its source may lie beyond mortal ken. It certainly lies beyond the constructions of rationality, indeed in a rationalist world, creativity has come to describe functions that lie beyond rational calculations.

Making something out of nothing, reaching a conclusion that could not be rationally deduced (ie out of thin air), intuitive leaps, inspired manipulation of shape and form, visitations by the muse – these are some of our ways of describing and interpreting creativity.

What we do know is that creativity is an essential ingredient of vitality and consequently of health and sustainability. We know that, no matter how mysterious and how risky, we must plan for creativity to flower. We know, with the problems we face, the capacity to transcend reason is a really valuable solution-development tool.

In arts practice, something being made out of nothing goes with the territory. This is why we recognise that arts practice is where the most intensive forms of creativity occur – in this realm things are regularly made out of nothing – a song, a tune, a poem, an image.

There are degrees of creativity. Less intense, but probably equally important, is the creativity inherent in transformation. Turning ideas into plans, speeches, designs, or theatre can be thought of as 'applied' creativity. Here we begin to see intuition and reason in interaction and are moving along the scale towards the 'managed' pole.

An operational description of 'managed'

Engagement in which independence is mediated; actions may be directed or guided; there are pre-determined outcomes aimed for by the guides; engagement is influenced by agents with purposes other than the interests of the engaged.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing: it describes supervised education, for example. I'm attempting here to describe a spectrum of 'engagement consciousnesses', not, at this point, to comparatively evaluate them.

The modes of engagement

These two axis (participation/reception; creative/managed) create four modes of cultural engagement that allow us to focus on what are clearly four quite different behaviours and attitudes requiring discrete analysis, evaluation and strategies.

<u>Creative participation</u>

Doing it. Hands on culture-making. Empowered, direct and active engagement. The cultural right: actively participating in the social production of the values and aspirations that inform one's society.

<u>Managed participation</u>

The efforts of those that make a living facilitating, distributing, presenting, exhibiting, publishing, selling, promoting, administering, funding, managing, conserving, protecting, curating, maintaining, teaching, training, educating, hiring, cleaning up, interpreting, analysing, criticising, researching in and around the sites of cultural production.

The work of volunteer fundraisers and ushers, interpreters and committee members, the equipment hire organisations, venue management, arts department government workers, arts teachers, community arts facilitators, cultural studies academics.

Creative reception

The most obvious (although it crosses over into participation pretty quickly) is 'audience' activity at dance parties. There are many others: book groups, doing cryptic crosswords, intense, kinetic museum tours where there is an expectation of 'observer' interaction, behind-the-scenes workshops, indeed receiving training of all kinds. The most subtle and profound, mysterious and often invisible of all creative reception is the world-view changes that occur through contact with the work of artists.

Managed reception

Consumption of cultural products in a primarily recreational/leisure context. Traditionally this has been the main area of measuring cultural vitality. In the context of the new paradigm it is obvious why this is no longer appropriate. Nevertheless, this mode produces hugely significant economic impacts AND there is always the chance that creative reception is involved.

Significant overlaps, ebbs and flows

We all operate in all of these modes at various times, sometimes in more than one at the same time.

Managed participation often slides into becoming creative participation as those engaged assume autonomy (singers becoming songwriters) and vice versa, as they relinquish control, lessen their focus (artists becoming teachers).

But becomings are not permanent state changes: many individuals have developed skills that allow them to alternate between (or operate simultaneously in) the participation modes

Creative reception can (and is often expressly designed to) lead into creative participation (students become artists).

Which point of entry offers maximum social impact?

Obviously, the mode of maximum engagement – creative participation.

Which brings me to cultural rights.

My position on this issue is that there need only be one: the right to actively participate in the social production of the values and aspirations that inform one's society.

Effective public support of the universal exercise of this right can be more effectively achieved by applying the framework I am proposing. Particularly because the framework illustrates quite clearly the position and the importance of 'creative participation'.

The universal maximisation of active autonomous engagement through creative participation is not simply the key objective for arts policies and even more widely focused cultural policies; it's an essential primary objective for any policy. Not just reasonable – essential.

A caveat, however: **social** impact would be maximised through **social** engagement. That is, community participation is the entry point.

Apart from this, significant cultural, social, environmental and economic impacts occur in all four modes.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Access

Why Access is a useful concept and how it can be used

In this chart, the quadrants have been laid onto a background labeled 'access'. The intended implication is that, for communities and individuals to engage, entry needs to be facilitated.

The ways in to each mode are different; some modes have been made more accessible than others (the 'managed' row and the 'reception' column, leaving mainly creative participation unexplored: a pity really, when it's the mode of maximum engagement).

Access can be thought of as a strategy for maximising participation and reception.

That is, the most effective way of achieving this maximisation is to ensure universal access to the tools required to operate in the four modes.

I think that by saying this, I'm in accord with Lisanne Gibson's assertion that resource management is the most sensible approach to program design in this area.

Note that, traditionally, access has meant access to the **products** of culture-making – ie the reception column of the grid. I'm saying that the concept of access needs to widened to encompass access to **all** modes. And in particular, access to the **tools** needed to creatively participate.

Access to what?

In order for communities to achieve maximum engagement in the creative participation mode, they need widespread and easy access to:

Time: many options – a shorter working week, mandatory arts elements in educational programs, paid time for cultural activities as a part of enterprise negotiations

Information: examples and models, guidelines to best practice, contact details

Equipment: the tangible materials and tools with which to make stuff

Networks: common interest and experience, support and sharing, discovery, dissemination and promotion

Sites: to work, to practice, to play, to experiment, to make, to show

Facilitation: people who are really good at liberating the creativity of others

Skill development: localisation and ownership of an ongoing skill-base

Continuity: 'access to continuity' sounds weird but is meaningful; communities need to be able to experience ongoing cultural engagement – stop-start projects can be counter-productive

Money: if all of the foregoing were available to communities at minimal cost to them then perhaps money wouldn't be an issue at all.

The challenge is to ensure the distribution of these resources is done in such a way that they become accessible, productively used and, as far as possible, locally sustainable and renewable.

That is, interventions are clearly needed, but they need to be 'embedded'.

My time is up and, while dealing with governance and engagement, as instructed, I haven't been able to discuss the ingredients of cultural vitality which is of course a matter very dear to my heart. I have yet another essay on this topic but it will have to wait for another time.

Thankyou.

For more information about the book or the Cultural Development Network contact Judy Spokes, Executive Officer on 03 9658 8850 or judspo@melbourne.vic.gov.au