The role of cultural vitality as one of the 'pillars of sustainability' for communities is well recognised. Hence our new National Cultural Policy, scheduled for release this year. Through it, says Arts Minister Simon Crean, the federal government will "work to support the arts and strengthen its contribution to a dynamic and diverse Australia."

Nations elsewhere share the view that culture, as expressed through the arts (although it also has other expressions), is a significant means of community building, as *John Smithies* reveals in his article below. Our case studies from Charters Towers and Port Adelaide Enfield provide proof of the pudding, while *Kim Dunphy* reports progress on a more vexed issue: the development of indicators to assist councils – and others – in their cultural planning.

The art of cultural development

by John Smithies
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A well thought-out arts policy can help councils build stronger, better-connected communities.

On the eve of the Australian Government delivering a National Cultural Policy, it is timely to consider the diversity of local cultures that underpin a national culture. Unlike the singular approach of a national government, the more than 560 local governments across Australia are a competitive laboratory of diversity. The different approaches and changing nature of local communities are important indicators for understanding the national culture.

The manifestation of a national culture is represented by thousands of activities by artists, producers and institutions, each responding to local conditions. While culture has always been a part of being human, its recent elevation to a 'cultural policy' is recognition that governments are taking culture seriously as a factor in planning for sustainability.

In the late 1980s, public policy began to be organised around three domains, or pillars: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance. The Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit of 1992 consolidated these into the idea of sustainable development and soon it became popularised as the 'triple bottom line'.

Through the 1990s these domains became the dominant policy framework, but still there was a recognition that the three pillars were not adequate in responding to the complexity and change in society. Many organisations, such as UNESCO and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, argued for the inclusion of culture in any model of sustainable development, the 'quadruple bottom line'. It was also acknowledged that culture influenced how people responded to development and change. In 2001, Cultural Development Network published *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* (Jon Hawkes) which, 10 years on, has confirmed the use of the term in many local government, state, national and international policy statements.

Introspecting (2008), *Liverpool Railway Station, New South Wales. Artist Therese Sweeney, project funded by Liverpool City Council.* Photo by Ian Hobbs.

The term 'culture' covers two streams of classification that we include in the broad objectives of cultural development. The first of these applies to the development of arts and heritage activities. Under culture, the arts such as literature, performance and visual arts are related to museums, built heritage, media and crafts, and form an identifiable sector of activity.

The second stream is the recognition that culture has a role in all public policies, particularly those strongly related to education, the economy, science, communication, environment, social cohesion and international cooperation.

Both these uses of culture are relevant, but require some clarification when applying them at a local governance level.

The world body of local government, UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) announced its policy on culture in 2010 by declaring:

Creativity, knowledge, diversity and beauty are the unavoidable bases for dialogue for peace and progress as these values are intrinsically connected to human development and freedoms.[1]

One way to bring arts and culture into the council agenda is to see one, arts, as a policy and the other, culture, as an impact of policy. Councils cannot regulate culture, but the policies and investments of council will have an impact on culture. This is a necessary distinction when considering culture and the arts.

An arts policy is by far the easier to implement. There are well-developed models and precedents for supporting arts activities in all the known forms in a community. The harder challenge is to fathom the impact of those policies on the culture of the municipality.

A well-resourced council can build infrastructure to house arts events or, if there is a lack of those resources, it can provide materials and artists to work with youth groups after school, for example. We know that arts and heritage buildings are important symbols for a community and impact on the culture of that community; and we know that participation in art-making is also important to health and wellbeing, which has an impact on culture. Both approaches are arts policy and only differ on scale.

On the other hand, a cultural perspective considers the impact of arts policy and other policies on the culture of the municipality. Culture exists with or without the intervention of councils and will also reflect the activities of citizens and the policies of public or private institutions.

By using the two approaches of cultural development a council can decide where to draw the line on its responsibility and where it can intervene and have a positive cultural impact on behalf of its citizens.

A cultural development approach is a way of understanding that all policies have an impact on the extant culture of the municipality.

All councils of all sizes and locations can apply a framework of cultural impact to their policymaking process. Some already have variations on this theme with cross-council committees and strong integration of policymaking, but for many it is a way of working that has yet to be fully implemented.

In this short essay I propose some simple first steps that have nil or a negligible draw on resources, but build knowledge and a capacity to plan for cultural development.

Firstly, for all arts-related activities (festivals, exhibitions or workshops), start a practice of considering the cultural impact of the activity in the post-event review, when things are visible and noteworthy. Look for these impacts and discuss them with participants. Writing a post-event report is standard practice and a heading 'cultural impact' and a brief paragraph will have two important results. It will start the process of thinking about cultural impact and it will document knowledge that will be used to build better projects and measures within council in the future. In this first step it is OK to consider the local conditions of what that impact might be and therefore the measures will mean something. For example, because of seed funding, an identified and underrepresented arts activity – perhaps a little-known traditional dance which has existed for some years in the community – gets regular recognition and attribution in the local media for the first time.

When including this 'cultural impact' paragraph becomes second nature and the report or evaluation of cultural impact is becoming fluent, then include the same heading and a brief paragraph at the

Mouth To Mountain (2009), *You Yangs, Victoria. City of Greater Geelong* Connecting Identities *project*. Photo by Bindi Cole.

other end of the activity, in the project proposal. That is, before the project is commenced. Consider a cultural outcome that can be predicted, based on previous knowledge, and that can be measured or evaluated in the post-activity report. Following the previous example, the predicted outcome to measure would be that the traditional dance is made more accessible to local citizens than previously. Private classes start and small groups are emerging in the community and they take the activity outside the traditional venues. Over time, we would measure how widely this newly acknowledged activity is understood. What impact does it have on local identity? What do surveys tell us?

There is a growing body of knowledge about cultural measures or indicators that can inform the process. The regular practice of building a cultural aim and a corresponding measure into the smallest or largest of arts activities will build knowledge and experience.

The third step is to start to build economic, social and environmental impacts into the post-event reports on arts activities and eventually into the proposal for the arts event, thereby demonstrating the interconnection of these policy domains.

The fourth step, and the aim of the first three steps, is to start the same process with all council policy development and activity reporting. As this way of working evolves over a period in a council's own culture, the measures and the reporting will reflect the cultural priorities of the municipality. There are no magic measures that can apply to any given local government area and therefore the time taken and the small steps summarised above will be built into a consistent and meaningful process for strengthening the community and the culture. It is a way of thinking and working that has to be learned through practice.

The interaction and overlap of the four policy domains of culture, environment, social and economic provide a dynamic view of public policy at a local, state and national level. The opportunity for local governments, and all governments, is to use their diversity of approaches to exchange ideas and for local government to lead in this growing area of public policy. The benefit is a stronger and connected community and a better (and measurable) application of council policies and investments.

1. UCLG Policy on Culture (2010). *Culture: Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development.*

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