

A PLACE FOR THE ARTS IN RURAL REVITALISATION AND THE SOCIAL WELLBEING OF AUSTRALIAN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract]

Despite the significance of rural Australia to national identity, many commentators claim that rural Australia is in crisis and suffering from decline as a consequence of economic restructuring and policy reform (Gray & Lawrence, 2001; Sonn, Drew, & Kasat, 2002; Baum, O'Connor, & Stimson, 2005; Tonts & Atherley, 2005). As a result, the social wellbeing of people living in rural Australia has become an issue of major national significance. Despite a number of commentators suggesting that the arts could play a crucial role in the contribution to the social wellbeing of rural communities, there is an absence of thorough research in this field (Kingma, 2002; Matarasso, 1997; Mills & Brown, 2004; Williams, 1995). The most rigorous research into the benefits and impact of the arts has been conducted with a focus on individual health and wellbeing in a clinical and therapeutic setting. Extensive research in a community setting however is somewhat limited. This paper demonstrates, through a review of the current literature, the place for the arts in rural revitalisation and therefore, the social wellbeing of a community, directly through tourism, income generation and employment opportunities, and indirectly by enhancing participation and creativity in public decision-making, strengthening community capacity, and strengthening identity and sense of place.

Keywords]

Arts, Rural communities, Social wellbeing, Culture, Capacity, Community development, Creativity, Participation

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Introduction

Over the past decade, an increasing body of research has focused on the changing social and economic conditions in rural Australia (eg Cocklin & Dibden, 2005; Gray & Lawrence, 2001; Pritchard & McManus, 2000). The impact of economic restructuring and policy reform on the social wellbeing of people living in rural Australia has become an issue of major national significance. Consequently, the past few years have seen considerable government and non-government resources dedicated to addressing the social problems facing rural areas. One of the notable silences in this literature is any consideration of the contribution of the arts to social wellbeing in rural areas. This is despite a number of commentators suggesting that the arts might play a crucial role in promoting social wellbeing in this regard (Kingma, 2002;

Matarasso, 1997; Mills & Brown, 2004; Williams, 1995). In addition, the arts also appear to have the potential to provide opportunities for tourism, income generation and employment and, thus, can contribute to the revitalisation of declining economies (Florida, 2002; Gibson, 2002; Guetzkow, 2002).

The bush pioneering spirit has been quintessential to Australian national identity since the founding of the new nation under European settlement. The traditional virtues of the 'Australian way of life',

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which embodies egalitarianism, classlessness, 'a fair go', stoicism, and mateship, are considered central to the welfare of the whole society (Cousins, 2005). Unlike the largely European-style cities and towns, where the majority of the population actually lived, the landscapes of the pastoral, agricultural and mining industries in rural and remote Australia were seen as unique (Jones & Birdsall-Jones, 2008). As such, the writings of Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson and the visual art of Frederick McCubbin, to name only a few, have continued to be pivotal in shaping Australian cultural identity as firmly rooted in rural Australia, even though only 37% of the population now lives outside the metropolitan areas of the capital cities (Trewin, 2005).

Despite the significance of rural Australia to national identity, many commentators claim that rural Australia is in crisis and suffering from decline (Baum et al., 2005; Gray & Lawrence, 2001; Sonn et al., 2002; Tonts & Atherley, 2005). The disadvantage is evident in the discrepancy between rural Australians and their urban counterparts with respect to standards of health, infrastructure, employment and education (Baum et al., 2005). Gray and Lawrence (2001) suggest that the global misfortune experienced by regional Australians is the result of global economic and political processes, and of the national impact of Australian policy moves towards a neoliberal ideology in recent decades. The influence of these policy reforms extend well beyond economic wellbeing and through a combination of a number of factors often termed rural restructuring, they have negatively affected the sustainability of life in regional Australia (Cocklin & Dibden, 2005; Gray & Lawrence, 2001; Pritchard & McManus, 2000).

There has long been an appreciation among community artists, arts workers and volunteers of the social impacts and benefits of engaging in the arts. These benefits extend beyond individuals considered disadvantaged or 'at-risk' to the overall health and wellbeing of societies and communities, particularly as they struggle to deal with economic, social, and environmental crises (Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Boon & Plastow, 2004; Hawkes, 2001; Mills & Brown, 2004; Sonn et al., 2002). However, recent policy debate about the arts, and subsequently their role in and value to both rural

communities and society generally, has been hampered by limitations in available data and the relative absence of a developed body of rigorous and independent research on the impact of the arts, particularly in specific regional contexts (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004). A Western Australian State inquiry into the impact of the arts in regional Western Australia concluded that there is a tendency for government to underestimate the importance of the arts which is reflected and exacerbated by the lack of empirical data at a regional level (Government of Western Australia, 2004). This finding stresses the need for research into the arts and its contribution to the social needs of rural people on a national level, not just in Western Australia (Marceau & Davidson, 2004).

This paper uses the terms *rural*, *the arts* and *social wellbeing* in the broadest sense possible, as there is inconsistency of definition and a certain degree of ambiguous usage of such terms in existing literature. Art is considered the product of creative expression and includes, but is not limited to, the performing arts (such as dance, theatre, and music), the visual arts and craft, literary arts and multimedia arts (for example, film, video, and digital arts). *Social wellbeing* refers to the social fabric of a community and includes, among other things, a sense of belonging, trust, reciprocity, identity, and place. The definition of a rural community is a bit more complicated. Regional Australia is often defined as those localities outside of the metropolitan areas of the state and territory capital cities (Lockie, 2000). Whereas, *rural* is used to describe communities based on primary industries or is defined on the basis of a combination of population size and density (Trewin, 2005). This paper includes communities either based on primary industries, such as agricultural, pastoral, mining or fisheries, or those considered remote or very remote by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) when referring to rural communities. It explores both the use of economic and social impact measures for arts advocacy and the utilisation of the arts as an instrument to promote both health and regional development. The examination investigates the limitations and inadequacies of the current literature as well as

advocates the need for future research to better inform policy and secure the future of Australia's rural communities.

The economic impact of the arts

Since Federation and up until the mid 1990s, the Australian government administered support and funding of Arts and defined Cultural Policy since, as a new nation, the prevailing rationale maintained that Australia did not have the capital or resources to support the sector without government assistance. This approach associated culture and the arts with the growth of this national culture and with the development of its people (Craik, 2007). This mindset still existed in 1994 when the Labor Government's Creative Nation cultural policy identified culture and the arts as 'a key building block of national culture and individual citizenship' (Craik, 2007, p. 14). The subsequent Coalition government, while continuing with the Creative Nation policy of Labor, invested more effort in the collection of statistics, commissioning reviews, and building business cases for the justification of government funding based on thorough research. This approach has ultimately resulted in more direct support from government for the arts (Craik, 2007). Thus, whereas government once took as a given the value of culture and the arts to society, nowadays the sector is required to justify the government funding it receives. It has been argued by Craik (2005) that arts and cultural policy is a complex area that cannot be justified in instrumental terms as being essential, unlike some 'public good' policy domains, such as health, education, housing and security. As such, it has been necessary for the arts to attempt to quantify their value in economic terms and, more recently, social measures, such as their contribution towards the wellbeing of society, rather than to rely on aesthetic reasoning. This suggests that the arts provoke responses of emotion, meaning, or pleasure that may not be possible to experience in any other way.

As a result of this historical reliance on aesthetic rationales related to the perceived intrinsic and civilising values of the arts in the UK, as in Australia, very little research was conducted in the area of arts impact until the late 1980s (Reeves, 2002). A key study on the economic impact of the

arts within the UK, conducted in 1988, identified the arts as a significant, growing and value-adding sector with a turnover of £10 billion and employing 500,000 people (Reeves, 2002). In the US, a report by Americans for the Arts puts the total value of economic activity by the non-profit arts industry in 2000 at \$134 billion generating the employment equivalent of 4.9 million full-time jobs (Cohen, Davidson, Brown, Costanzo, & Canzonetti, 2002). This report, among others, showed that spending in the arts sector leads to spending in other sectors of the economy, enhancing wealth and job creation. Thus, economic impact studies have been used to demonstrate tangible financial benefits in order to establish the arts as a critical element in the economic growth of the state (Sterngold, 2004). This has set the stage for local authorities and public funding agencies to document and argue the case for the role of the arts and creative industries as important agents for economic development and urban renewal (Reeves, 2002).

Researchers in the field also document the limitations of economic impact research to build a case for the arts. In particular, Sterngold (2004) suggests that conventional economic impact studies have a narrow focus and are not designed to assess how culture and the arts enhance a community's social amenities and quality of life, nor how these social benefits contribute to an area's long-term economic growth and vitality. Other commentators suggest that economic impact tools are being inappropriately used and economists have expressed concern over the technological and practical limitations of the methodologies used to support these techniques (Madden, 2001). For example, there is little evidence to suggest that government support of the arts spurs economic growth, but rather that consumers spend money on the arts instead of other leisure or recreational activity (Sterngold, 2004). There are also several difficulties with the analysis of economic statistics when assessing the impact of the arts sector. This is partially due to an underestimation of employment in cultural industries and occupations in census based data. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Gibson, Murphy, & Freestone, 2002) participation in the cultural economy is overwhelmingly informal, part-time or transient. Patterns of supply and

demand alone do not ultimately determine creative pursuits. Other factors such as the extent that cultural expertise can develop through government support and taxation incentives constrain rates of participation. Furthermore, as employment or income from arts activity is often unreliable, participation in the arts is dependent upon the provision of stable, flexible and part-time work by other industries to enable artists to earn alternative sources of income, yet still be available to participate in their chosen art form when the opportunity arises.

Other criticism of the use of economic impact justifications for the public support of the arts relates to the implications for the arts sector itself. In particular an overreliance on the economic, as opposed to the sociocultural, value of the arts fails to account for the health, education, social inclusion (Reeves, 2002) and intrinsic benefits of the arts (McCarthy et al., 2004). Another argument against the use of solely economic measures is the lack of evidence linking economic growth and the wellbeing, quality of life or sustainability of society. Hawkes (2001) suggests that, in the field of wellbeing research, it has been demonstrated that, while Western society is more materially prosperous than in the past, many of its members feel excluded, powerless and unhappy. Thus, what is good for the economy is not necessarily good for society. Furthermore, whilst the Australian economy may be strong overall, this does not reflect discrepancies within Australia's regional economies where some communities are thriving and others are declining at varying rates.

Despite resistance from the arts sector to rely wholly on economic justifications for their existence and support, there is recognition, amongst researchers and governments, that creativity has become crucial to the success of regional economies and that they are a fundamental means through which places are perceived (Gibson et al., 2002; Government of Western Australia, 2003). A consistent policy theme for rural Australia is the facilitation of 'community capacity' for local self-management to strengthen regional economic and social opportunities (Trewin, 2005). While not without its own criticism and problems to date, Indigenous tourism is an opportunity that has the potential to provide both economic and social benefits (Bultjens & Fuller, 2007). The arts have made substantial contributions

to local economies through cultural tourism, and in particular by providing a source of income generation for Indigenous people and communities through cultural heritage and appreciation, as well as the high end international arts market (Pearn, 2007). This is particularly significant for ensuring the sustainability of many rural and remote communities dependent upon primary industries, such as mining and agriculture, as cultural tourism not only provides additional economic opportunities but also builds capacity and strengthens local identity, thus improving social wellbeing (Bultjens & Fuller, 2007; Pearn, 2007).

The use of the arts in health and development

A focus on individual health and wellbeing in a clinical and therapeutic setting comprises the most rigorous research into the benefits and impacts of the arts. This research is generally borne out of a medical model of health and wellbeing and frequently involves the use and expansion of the art therapy model. The area of art therapy is arguably the most well known and researched area on the effects of arts participation for people with disabilities and illness. As well as providing a means for self-expression, art and the use of imagination can help to increase communication, self-esteem and wellbeing, and alleviate the stress and anxiety experienced when a person is coming to terms with illness, as well as assisting in the management of pain and the side effects of treatment (Argyle & Bolton, 2005; Staricoff, 2004).

The growing field of 'art in health' in the UK expands to all facets of the health sector, including community health, as shown in Figure 1. The art in health field can be defined as comprising all activities that aim to use arts-based approaches to improve individual and community health, health promotion, healthcare or seek to enhance the healthcare environment through visual art and performances (Macnaughton, White, & Stacy, 2005). This model is supported by extensive research conducted on the use of the arts in the design of health care facilities in the creation of the 'healing environment', which has been shown to play a critical role in the speed of recovery (Eames, 2003; Hamilton, Hinks, & Peticrew, 2002).

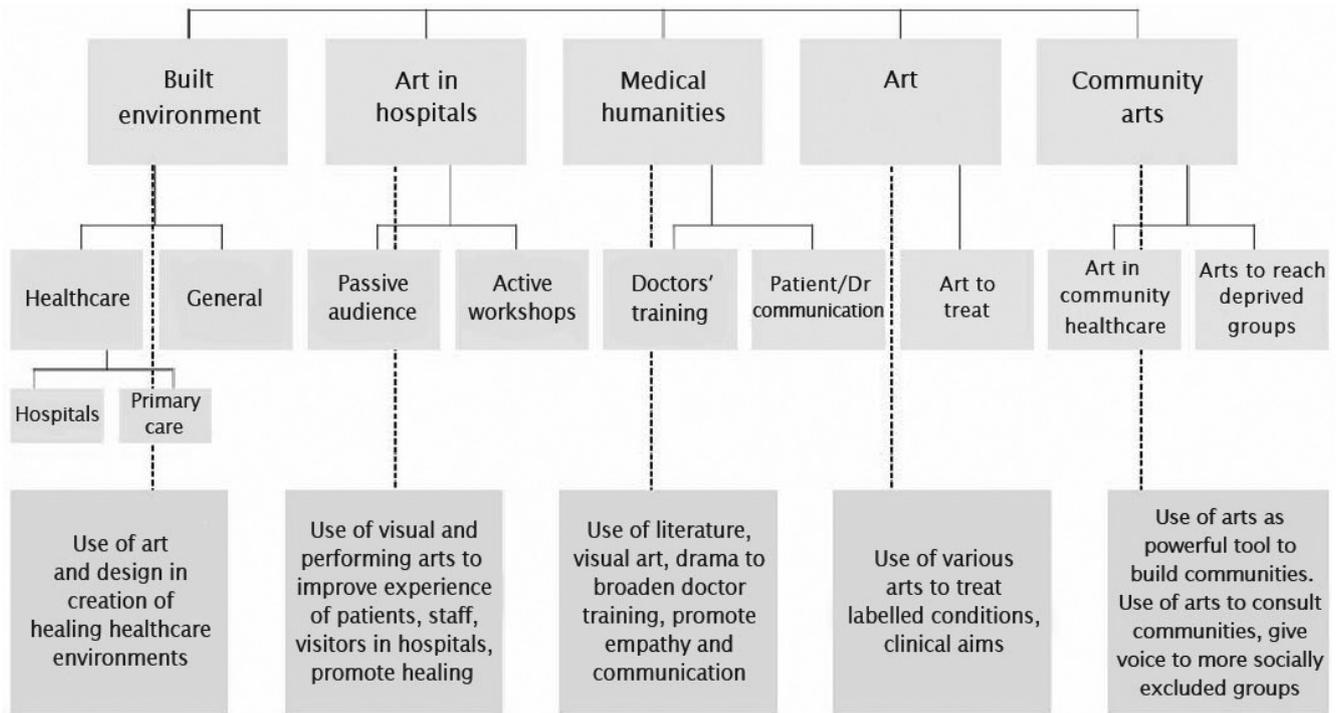


Figure 1: Map of the art for health field. (Health Development Agency, 2001 cited in Angus, 2002:42)

To improve communication and understanding between patients and health professionals across social and ethnic groups, the arts have also been utilised in training and professional development (Staricoff, 2004).

According to Macnaughton and colleagues (2005), there is no doubt that, in general, the arts are good for the health of society since they provide interest, amusement, satire, challenge and vision, but the arts are also seen as essential to human flourishing, or, more specifically, to the complete sense of physical, social and mental wellbeing (Macnaughton et al., 2005). A Swedish longitudinal survey concluded that attendance at certain kinds of cultural events may have a beneficial effect on longevity. Specifically, analysis of the data revealed that attending the cinema, concerts or visits to museums and art exhibitions influences mortality in a positive direction (Konlaan, Bygren, & Johansson, 2000). When the eight control variables of age, sex, educational level, income, disease prevalence, social networks, smoking and physical exercise were accounted for, the results showed that people who attend cultural events most often seem to live longer than those who attend rarely (Bygren et al., 1996).

The most interesting component of the arts in health movement throughout the UK for the purposes of this study is its expansion from individual health to community health approaches and its strong focus on the social determinants of health. Community-based art for health involves the ‘use of art to address health and wellbeing, but its aims are diverse and not entirely clear’ (Angus, 2002, p. 3). Its boundaries are not defined and they include participative arts, therapeutic arts, health promotion, community development, environmental enhancement, exhibitions and performances, and staff development among others (Angus, 2002). Primarily, however, the arts have been used in this sense within communities to address mental health issues and the social inclusion of marginalised communities, such as the elderly and other disadvantaged groups (Argyle & Bolton, 2005; Sixsmith & Kagan, 2005).

The health of rural Australia is poor when compared to its urban and metropolitan counterparts (Townsend, Moore, & Mahoney, 2002). Rural Australians have higher incidents of diseases and disorders, higher death rates and higher rates of suicide (Black et al., 2000; Gray & Lawrence, 2001). Social factors such as unemployment, violence, socioeconomic status,

poverty and technological change have significant mental health consequences, and these are compounded by limited social support networks, economic and education opportunities, and limited access to health care services (World Health Organisation, 2001).

In Western Australia, the State Government spends over \$2.5 billion on health every year. Most of the health budget is spent on diagnosis and treatment (82%), and 8% is spent on continuing care, leaving 10% for prevention and promotion, or public health, also known as population health (Epidemiology Branch, 2004). Many health promotion programs result in savings for the health system that are greater than the cost of the programs. This is because early intervention, which prevents people from getting sick, significantly reduces the burden of disease in the community. For example, it is estimated that the reduction in smoking prevalence in Western Australia since 1970 has saved approximately \$1.23 billion in direct hospital costs (Epidemiology Branch, 2004). The growing emphasis on the social determinants of health recognises the impact of the health and wellbeing of the community, including its social, economic and environmental factors, on individual health. This is especially relevant for mental health, which the WA Department of Health recognises as the third leading cause of disease burden in Western Australia. People who are mentally healthy are happier and generally enjoy better health, better relationships, and are more likely to live longer. However, maintaining good mental health is a complex task, and is generally linked with individuals pursuing meaningful personal goals and sustaining satisfying relationships (Epidemiology Branch, 2004).

While research specific to roles and impacts of the arts in a community setting is somewhat limited, and almost nonexistent for rural communities, there is a general consensus among a variety of disciplines that community participation is a key element in individual wellbeing and the health of that community (VicHealth, 2005). The benefits of culture and recreation with respect to physical health in improving self-concept, self-esteem, and decreasing depressive symptoms, stress and anxiety are well documented (Torjman, 2004). However, participation in activities such as sport and recreation

also provides opportunities for socialising, building friendship networks, reducing social isolation and enhancing community wellbeing (VicHealth, 2005) through the development of relationships, networks and norms that support collective action (Torjman, 2004).

In addition to the obvious benefits to physical health, sport creates a sense of local pride and can form the basis of tight knit communities. Thus, it is obvious why, in rural Australia, with limited facilities, infrastructure and alternative social opportunities, sport is such a central part of rural life. Sport can help to overcome problems associated with racism and, to a certain degree, social exclusion by contributing to social networks that might not otherwise develop. However non-participation can hinder or prevent the development of social networks across racial lines (Tonts, 2005). There is also a potentially negative aspect to sport, because through the creation of a strong sense of identity and attachment to a specific place, this bond can limit the potential for bonds to form between neighbouring towns or regions (Tonts, 2005) and as such violence and aggression are more prevalent at competitive sporting events. 'Social sorting' in sport can also occur and is linked to income, as well as gender and race, with women and indigenous people sometimes excluded from either participation in sport or events associated with that sport (Tonts, 2005).

Ensuring that communities and populations have the opportunity for good mental health and wellbeing requires work across individual, community, organisational and societal levels (Keleher & Armstrong, 2005). The importance of the arts in the process of rural community development, particularly in geographically dispersed communities, is emphasised by Shaw (1995, as cited in Coalter, 2001) because of the ability of the arts to create a focus for social and community activity and thus to reduce isolation. This is where arts and cultural activities can complement the often sports-crazed nature of Australian rural communities. In comparison to sport, the arts are arguably less competitive. Indeed, the Government of Western Australia (2004) further suggested that the arts provide an inclusive base from which communities can

develop tolerance and understanding, in turn helping to foster and strengthen the identity of a town or region. This view is supported by the Western Australian *State Sustainability Strategy* which asserts that the 'arts and culture are central to the identity of a healthy and vibrant society' (Government of Western Australia, 2003, p. 250), allowing the exploration of issues and providing the 'creative edge' necessary when communities are confronted with new and difficult problems. Matarasso (1997) suggests that the arts are unique in this regard because of their concern with meaning and values and that they stand out from other forms of participation in terms of who they engage and the quality of that engagement.

Bush and Baum (2001) make a further distinction between two types of participation: social and civic. It is possible to consider sport a form of social participation, which, according to the findings of Bush and Baum, predicts health status. Civic participation, on the other hand, is more likely to predict a sense of community control. There is a case to be made for considering engaging in the arts as both a social and civic activity. It is social, because participation in the arts can be in the form of a hobby, for fun or recreation, informally, in public space, and/or as a group activity. The arts can be and have been utilised as a means of engagement in civic activities. For example, to make a political statement or protest, to raise awareness or draw attention to an issue, and as a means of engaging the community to work towards creative and collaborative solutions (for example see Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Boon & Plastow, 2004; Brennan-Horley, Connell, & Gibson, 2007; Mills & Brown, 2004; Ruane, 2007).

The World Health Organisation's *Health for All 2000* strategy, launched in 1978 (cited in Bush & Baum, 2001), regards participation as central to health and places an emphasis on strengthening community action to achieve health promotion changes in the physical and social environment. This strategy was also the driver for the development of a Mental Health Promotion framework by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth, 1999) to support and foster activity that encouraged social inclusion, promote economic participation and value diversity in order to improve community

mental health and wellbeing (VicHealth, 2004). It was out of this framework that VicHealth Launched the *Arts for Health Program* in 2000. This program contributes to mental health promotion through funding schemes that create opportunities for participation and access in the arts; increase ways for communities to engage with each other through the arts, and; promote healthy environments in which arts activity takes place.

The value of community participation and the use of the arts and culture to facilitate development and strengthen community capacity has been a central tenet of community arts and, more recently, Community Cultural Development (CCD). Community arts developed in the UK during the 1960s as a rebellion against a belief commonly held by the Arts Council, and reified through the public funding of buildings and infrastructure, that people who were interested in the arts would come to a building (Baldry, 1981). CCD can be defined as the utilization of culture and the arts for community empowerment and action (Community Arts Network SA, 2008). Both Community Arts and CCD utilise the arts to achieve community development outcomes through fostering local participation (Sonn et al., 2002). By promoting community capacity and a sense of community through culture and the arts 'community arts... provide a medium through which community members engage in the joint identification and production of images, symbols and other resources which index their visions and aspirations for their community' (Sonn et al., 2002, p. 12). Research commissioned by the CCD Board of the Australia Council in 2004 entitled *Art and Wellbeing* examined a collection of case studies demonstrating the connection between CCD and health, sustainable development, public housing and place, rural revitalisation, community strengthening, active citizenship, social inclusion and cultural diversity (Mills & Brown, 2004). This work demonstrated the potential for CCD to impact on all aspects of the community in positive and progressive ways.

Criticism of arts impact research

While it is helpful to examine the application of the arts in both health and community development, there has been some resistance to these moves from

the broader arts sector. Points of resistance include the competition for already limited public funding, as well as the expectation that all arts activity will have to justify its existence through the achievement of non-arts related outcomes. For example, Keleher and Armstrong (2005) list community arts programs as number seven in a list of nine interventions reviewed to increase social inclusion for the promotion of positive mental health. As a means to an end, the arts are dispensable once another intervention method proves more effective. This approach can also downplay other benefits and outcomes inherent in and unique to the arts. Macnaughton and colleagues (2005) found, in their review of community-based arts for health projects, that arts organisations regard the production and consumption of art as good in itself and they therefore did not see the need for justification by an evidence base. A review of the arts in health movement in the UK identified a number of concerns from the arts sector, specifically that the arts would need to maintain its integrity if it were to be effective and that there was some potential for the requirements of a particular intervention to impinge on that integrity (Angus, 2002). Thus, a tension is created between an instrumental approach, that is, art is a tool that fulfils funders' policy objectives, and a transformational approach that trusts in the arts process in and of itself to deliver positive outcomes (Macnaughton et al., 2005).

A review of the literature on arts impact research and arts and wellbeing thus reveals a substantial amount of interest in the field. However, this research is not without criticism. One of the major issues in research on the arts is the problem of definition. Not only are 'the arts' notoriously difficult to define, so too is the nature of peoples' participation therein. This is largely because of the diversity not only in art forms themselves, but also the diversity in those activities considered engaging or participating in arts practice. Many authors have also identified several key areas of contention, in particular a lack of robust data and evidence, difficulty in the quantification of impacts, including identifying outcomes and developing indicators with few attempts made to standardise procedures, and difficulty in using economic impact measurement (Jermyn, 2001; McQueen-Thomson, James, &

Ziguras, 2004; Reeves, 2002). Other factors subject to scrutiny are the methods of data collection, including the choice of the sample and the purpose, intention and bias of the researchers themselves. These have largely gone unrecognised, or at least 'unscrutinised' in the literature.

There is a tendency for research in this field to be highly qualitative, and to be based on the analysis of single communities (Reeves, 2002; International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies, 2004), and rarely is any distinction made between metropolitan and regional, or urban and rural communities. Much of the literature consists primarily of reviews, case-studies and summations of project evaluations. Very little quantitative research exists, and rarely are the findings published in peer-reviewed journals. Rather, the organisations themselves supply the findings. Marceau and Davison (2004) therefore suggest there is a need for a better mixture of qualitative and quantitative research that is able to provide a better feel for the geographical differences between places (see also Guetzkow, 2002). The absence of detailed research on the contribution of arts to social wellbeing is not restricted to rural areas. Throughout much of the developed world there have been numerous calls for further research investigating the links between participation in the arts and the social wellbeing of all citizens (Guetzkow, 2002; McCarthy et al., 2004; Reeves, 2002).

Research by Anwar McHenry (2005) attempted to address some of the issues mentioned above through a quantitative survey on arts participation and wellbeing for a rural community in Western Australia's Great Southern region. The study combined social capital, life satisfaction and happiness indicators to gauge a measure of subjective wellbeing and correlated the responses with participation in both the arts and other community-related groups and activities. The findings have shown that satisfaction, wellbeing and social capital indicators have been underutilised in this area to date. Yet such measures can be easily adapted for demonstrating significant relationships between different types of participation, including the arts, as well as the amount of participation, although the determination of a direct casual link would require the use of an experimental model.

Anwar McHenry's research presents an exception to most research conducted thus far as to date, there has been an overriding tendency for research to be limited to evaluations of individual projects, rather than examinations of arts engagement generally, including, for example, ongoing participation in a local arts and craft group or regular attendance at contemporary music concerts (Anwar McHenry, 2005).

Conclusion

It has been suggested by McCarthy and colleagues (2004), that people are not drawn to the arts for their instrumental effects, but because of the meaning, pleasure and emotional stimulation that they provide and that these intrinsic effects are satisfying in themselves. Furthermore, while the context is varied, the arts are used as a form of communication, to question norms, express ideas and strengthen social bonds (Coote & Shelton, 1992; Firth, 1992; Shaw, 2003). While extensive research is somewhat limited, it does suggest that the arts contribute to rural revitalisation both directly, through economic opportunities such as Indigenous Arts Centres and tourism opportunities, and indirectly by enhancing participation and creativity in public decision-making, strengthening community capacity, and strengthening identity and sense of place. Both these direct and indirect impacts enhance social wellbeing which, in turn, impacts positively on local economies, social relations and health.

Dissanayake (1988) considers the arts to be ubiquitous, suggesting that the arts have survival value. A reconnection with the arts and creativity in rural and regional Australia may be the missing ingredient to the community's survival, by building resilience and providing the innovation necessary for communities to deal with social and economic change, rural restructuring and the threat of rural decline. While the case is strong for the connection between social wellbeing and the arts in theory, the field is still in its infancy and more research is necessary to build the evidence base. An evidence base informed by research examining the link between social wellbeing and the arts in theory will contribute to developing and designing policies that can support and fully take advantage of this relationship for the betterment of rural and regional Australia.

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