

COMMUNITY-BASED CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS WITHIN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES—A CULTURAL POLICY DILEMMA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the notion of community-based cultural organisations as a new type of organisation that combines the community orientated objectives of community arts practice with the commercially oriented creative industries. This has resulted in organisational goals that place equal emphasis on process and product. By combining these goals, organisations have responded to much of the criticism levelled at previous community arts practice.

In New Zealand, however, these organisations are hampered by gaps in cultural policy, which limits their ability to gain legitimacy and agency in either the arts or the creative industry fields. The commodity/public good split in cultural policy remains the dominant discourse for both central and local government in New Zealand. This paper argues that if community-based cultural organisations are to be supported by government policy an integrated policy approach needs to be adopted. Such an approach would need to combine both economic and social outcomes as integral elements of the field of cultural practice and production.

(N.b. Readers who associate the term 'community-based cultural organisation' with community-based indigenous peoples' organisations should note that in this article I use the term broadly to encompass a wider range of organisations.)

KEYWORDS: arts, creative industries, community, cultural policy

INTRODUCTION

Creative products are always a community affair (Seitz 2003: 4-5)

In this paper I theorise that a new type of organisation, the community-based cultural organisation, evolved in the late 1990s out of an intersection between the community arts movement and the creative industries. This development has occurred in a rapidly changing cultural milieu dominated by competing discourses of art and the creative industries. As an existing site of organisational practice, the community-based cultural organisation presents challenges for cultural policy makers and organisational advisers alike.

I argue that community-based cultural organisations are an expression of what Seitz (2002) calls 'a community affair' being an integral part of the cultural milieu that has given rise to the creative industries.

My research shows that community-based cultural organisations are situated in the same locality-based environments that spawned the community arts movement in the 1970s and 1980s. However, in contrast to this movement, these new organisations embrace global influences through their use of new communication technologies and participation in the market place of the creative industries. Imbued with seemingly conflicting ideologies of local cultural development (derived from the community arts movement) and the creative industries (based on free market principles), these organisations have developed by responding successfully to their environments and by adapting organisational practices to meet their own needs.

Community-based cultural organisations combine non-profit and commercial objectives to achieve a blend of traditional and new genres of artistic and cultural expression that have rendered them invisible within traditional policy frameworks. These organisations seek to be recognised by the cultural mainstream but continue to be vulnerable economically, as they are neither wholly viable financially as businesses nor well catered for in current arts and cultural policy or funding.

I argue that current cultural policy in New Zealand does not support community-based cultural organisations and that an integrated approach advocated by scholars of cultural policy development—such as Caust (2003), Evans (2001), Mercer (1998b), Rentschler (1998), Volkerling (2002) and others—offers a more appropriate policy framework for supporting such organisations.

METHODOLOGY

In order to research this topic I conducted interviews with four community-based organisations that were involved in creative or artistic pursuits in Dunedin, New Zealand. Primary research was approved by the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee and undertaken using the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews. In order to ensure a sense of 'boundedness' (Holliday: 2002) I chose these organisations from the same locality in order to enable comparisons to occur based on their existence within similar contexts (e.g., distance from policy makers, access to information, funding available, local social and economic conditions, etc).

Interviews were undertaken during 2002, which were semi-structured and covered a number of common themes. The themes chosen corresponded with an environmental analysis used by researchers such as Jones and May (1992) for the conceptualising of organisational environments. A feedback process was provided so that informants had the opportunity to review interview transcripts prior to their analysis.

DEFINING COMMUNITY-BASED CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

In defining community arts, Beatson and Beatson maintain that 'community artists contrast the virtues of participation, local autonomy and cultural democracy with the

opposed practice of artistic “diffusion” (Beatson & Beatson 1994: 67). They go on to suggest that community art may sometimes be an expression of culture rather than the singularly defined term, art, thereby separating community art from high art.

While on many levels this definition is sufficient to cover the work of the organisations in my study, I argue that these organisations also exhibit characteristics of the creative industries.

Economist Richard Cave defines the creative industries as ‘industries which supply goods and services that we broadly associate with cultural, artistic, or simply entertainment value’ (Cave, cited in Flew 2002: 3). With products and services which include an Internet cafe, website, music performance, exhibitions and music publishing, all four of the organisations studied fit within Cave’s definition of the creative industries. What makes them unique is that this is achieved within a community development framework.

Another link to the creative industries is the way these organisations use new technology. New technology was viewed by all the organisations studied as valuable for community building, promotion and communication. All the organisations embraced new technology, attributing similar values to those offered by theorists such Simanainen (2002) who argue that a new techno-economic discourse has persuaded artists to act as entrepreneurs and as networked artists who are required to broaden their capacities beyond their artistic skills. This in turn has taken artists out of the garret, so to speak, and has required them to create

strategic alliances, thereby reducing the distinction between art and life (Simanainen 2002).

The negotiation between different cultural environments was a characteristic that broadened the scope of these organisations. One of the organisations talked of having to speak in different cultural languages and translating from one group to another. This also contributes to the definition of these organisations as community-based cultural organisations rather than simply as community arts organisations. The World Commission on Culture and Development defines culture as 'providing a shared language' (Jeannotte 2003: 36. Jeannotte explains that cultural symbols and languages are sites that accumulate meaning and power, with art providing only one of these languages. In this case, the translation is about one cultural group (bureaucrats) understanding another cultural group (a community of artists, performers and their audiences).

In addition, the study also found that locality was integral to the identity of these organisations. The city of Dunedin was seen by the organisations as a stronghold of ideals and philosophy; this confirmed that they were not solely concerned with art, but also with community, beliefs, identity, attitudes and lifestyle. These are all attributes Beatson and Beatson (1994) assign to their definition of culture.

Unconsciously, this pluralistic focus also provides a response to the criticism levelled at community arts practice. Critics argue that a weakness of community arts practice is its

dual focus on art and community; by locating themselves in a broader cultural perspective community-based cultural organisations are countering such criticism. By shifting their focus to embrace popular culture, organisations can respond to critics of community arts practice by challenging the rhetoric of excellence associated with high art. This involves working with the material elements of everyday life that, in this case, includes elements of popular culture (Bennett & Mercer 1998; Cunningham 1992; Rowse 1989).

The organisations studied believed they were offering a form of communitarian, socially redemptive practice normally associated with community arts practice, yet also participated in a commercial environment offering for sale goods and services and/or embracing new technologies more commonly associated with the creative industries. For some, there was a conscious choice to compete with purely commercial organisations. This choice was reflected in their goals, a desire to earn income and the range of activities they engage in. The sources of income for these organisations include both philanthropic grants and commercial activities.

Herein lies the dichotomy: their commercial activities categorise them as commodity producers for the creative industries, while their charitable or non-profit philosophy classifies them as 'public good' organisations pursuing a community arts goal. These mixed-income, cultural organisations demonstrate a breakaway from earlier community arts models through their lack of dependency on government and philanthropic funding. To this extent, they operate in a manner that is consistent with Mercer's (1998a)

argument for a redefinition of the term 'culture' in relation to the creative industries to include both publicly funded and commercial activities. Mercer argues that this redefinition of what constitutes culture represents a return to a pre-enlightenment and pre-romantic view of the arts as 'living and doing' rather than as a narrowly defined art of aesthetics.

While I acknowledge that the small size of this study was obviously a disadvantage to any claim that I have identified a new type of organisation, I would argue that, at the very least, a more pluralistic viewing of community-based organisations is warranted. The argument for a new form of organisation (which I have named the 'community-based cultural organisation') which has grown out of an intersection between community arts practice and the creative industries, is compelling, as it explains why these groups have difficulties fitting into existing policy frameworks.

When compared in Table 1, it is clear that community-based cultural organisations have their own set of characteristics that distinguish them from, and link them to, other forms of arts or cultural organisations.

Table 1: Characteristics of four types of arts and cultural organisations

Organisational Characteristics	Community-based cultural organisations	Community arts organisations	Creative industry companies	Professional arts organisation
Commodity or public good driven?	Both	Public good	Commodity	Public good
Income derived from sale of products or services/holding or trading in intellectual property?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Income derived from arts or community grants?	Yes	Yes	Unlikely	Yes
Income derived from business development grants?	No	No	Yes	Unlikely
Primary goal to develop a sense of community?	Yes	Yes	No	No
Primary goal to present excellence in a defined art form?	Sometimes	No	Sometimes	Yes
Primary goal to successfully produce and sell a creative product or service that has popular appeal?	Yes	No	Yes	No
Organisational structure flat and fluid?	Likely	Rarely	Likely	Unlikely
Organisational structure hierarchical?	Unlikely	Often	Unlikely	Yes
Locality-based?	Yes	Yes	No	Often

The analysis of the four types of arts and cultural organisations in Table 1 offers an argument for further investigation into the way arts and cultural organisations are developing in 2003 and beyond. My research indicates that current delineations between

commercial and non-profit art and culture are outmoded and that a more postmodern approach is necessary in order to reclassify organisations that are already operating in the cultural sphere.

THE COMMUNITY-BASED CULTURAL ORGANISATION AND CULTURAL POLICY

This mix of commercial and non-profit popular culture and high/mid/low art makes it difficult for community-based cultural organisations to fit with current policy related to arts or the creative industries. The literature that argues for an integrated approach to cultural policy bridges this gap and provides greater opportunities for organisations, such as those studied, to access resources.

The fragmentation of cultural policy in New Zealand into either arts policy under the Ministry of Culture and Heritage or creative industries policy under the Ministry of Economic Development (delivered via Industry New Zealand) causes problems for community-based cultural organisations unable to fit wholly into either policy framework. Such organisations are particularly affected at the local body level where this polarisation of policy is replicated. Embracing a broad base of activity that involves a range of creative, community and commercial projects locates community-based cultural organisations between the commodity/public good split prevalent in New Zealand's current cultural policy framework.

This makes community-based cultural organisations difficult to categorise from the perspective of Creative New Zealand or Industry New Zealand and, as such, causes them to fall into the gap between their policies. This in turn affects their ability to access funding and resources. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage, since it enables community-based cultural organisations to gain income from a range of sources and therefore renders them less vulnerable to political influences. However, the fragmented nature of cultural policy in New Zealand means they fall between policy and funding criteria, signifying gaps in funding policy. Volkerling (2000) warns that by following this approach governments risk marginalising culture and promoting social exclusion. If cultural planning is addressed as a holistic process incorporating social, economic and cultural considerations, Mercer (1998b) believes, contradictions between commercial and cultural activity will be avoided.

Interestingly, the research indicated that being completely dependent on grant funding had implications for an organisations autonomy. The strength of political influence by government agencies such as Creative New Zealand may be seen in the choices made by the only organisation within the study that was solely dependent on grant funding. Tailoring its programmes to fit with funding policy enabled this organisation to work with more than one community. They nevertheless appeared to have the greatest difficulty in achieving their funding targets.

The development of new organisations out of those previously imbued with the philosophy of community arts raises issues for cultural policy theorists. These organisations have embraced some of the values and the economic imperative of the creative industries while retaining a commitment to the notion of community development. As a result, cultural policy needs to recognise these mixed income organisations that are a combination of creative research and development, commerce and community development activities. This is particularly relevant for local authorities in New Zealand developing cultural policies as a requirement of the new *Local Government Amendment Act 2002*.

The research found that local government had even more difficulty with the ‘art versus industry’ question than did central government. While active lobbying and networking allowed one of the organisations to break the barrier created by current funding policy and secure significant central government funding from unexpected sources, this approach failed to impact on local government. With strong support in the literature for local government’s role in cultural planning, and the *Local Amendment Government Act 2002* advocating the same, it is clear that much work needs to be done on the part of local government (with this local authority, at least) to understand the policy implications for community-based cultural organisations already active in their community.

Jones and May (1992) argue that by responding to its political and economic environments an organisation can increase its capacity to mobilise power and legitimacy.

For one of the organisations studied, a political/economic approach enabled it to seek funding outside specific schemes by attempting to address local needs in a way that was applicable on a regional and national basis. It has been successful in winning contracts to provide services for two government bodies (one of which is not traditionally associated with arts and culture) as an independent contractor.

While providing some degree of agency over political influences, those organisations providing commercial products and services found that the market could actually exert its own influence. Retaining control of their products could be achieved only through the active management of market influences.

All the organisations commented on the fact that they had difficulty gaining support and recognition from local government. Most commented that one department of the local authority (Dunedin City Council) was supportive, but that this did not translate into other areas. The local authority had deemed this relationship was most appropriately managed through the Community and Recreation Planning Section. Despite the significant commercial or local economic development potential of these organisations, the Economic Development Section seemed reluctant to maintain any relationship. This problem is of particular concern to these organisations, given that the Dunedin City Council's Arts and Cultural Policy suggests a fairly integrative approach.

A number of theorists (Mercer 1998b; Evans 2001; Dixon-Moore & Atwell 1998; Rentschler 2002) have focused on local government as the most appropriate conduit for

implementing cultural policy initiatives. Evans (2001) argues that in order to be truly effective, cultural issues must be addressed at the level of a borough or ward's community plan. He advocates an integrative policy approach, including economic development, transport, land use, health etc. In order to be successful, Evans predicts, these have to be developed with consideration for the distribution of power within the decision-making processes. He goes on to cite the creative industries' embodiment of contemporary and popular culture as a vehicle from which to develop a pluralist society. It is interesting to contrast the actual experience of the organisations with their local authority with Evans' checklist for assessing the effectiveness of local authorities in planning for arts and culture (Evans 2001: 283–285):

Table 2: Evaluating* the Dunedin City Council's Effectiveness in Cultural Planning

*using Evans' (2001: 283–285) checklist

<p>Strategic and/or local content</p> <p>Are the arts shown to be of strategic or borough wide importance?</p>	<p>There is an arts and cultural policy which sits in the Community and Recreation Planning section, however while it advocates an integrative and local approach this does not appear to be implemented or appear in community plans.</p>
<p>Economy and employment</p> <p>Is there a maximisation of suitable facilities for both voluntary and business-generating arts activities?</p>	<p>The fact that one of the organisations is seeking to buy a building to develop an 'arts hub' suggests that public owned space is lacking.</p>
<p>Environment</p> <p>Do the arts relate to town centre development, regeneration, urban and landscape plans?</p>	<p>There is no evidence of the 'arts hub' being considered as part of any plans considering it is in part of a currently regenerating part of the central city.</p>
<p>Image</p> <p>Is there a designated arts and cultural quarter?</p>	<p>Not promoted by the local authority.</p>
<p>Accessibility</p> <p>Are the arts catered for in multi-use facilities, public transport and public safety plans?</p>	<p>Not known.</p>
<p>Infrastructure</p> <p>Is the supply, need and demand for facilities reconciled and is there regional liaison and planning?</p>	<p>This was addressed in a limited way in relation to facilities for major entertainment events with the 2002 recreation strategy.</p>
<p>Equal opportunity</p> <p>Is there consideration for disabled access?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Design</p> <p>Are the arts considered in urban design?</p>	<p>Yes and No. There is an Art in Public Places policy, however funding to implement this has not been allocated in 2000.</p>
<p>Arts, Culture and Entertainment</p> <p>Is the importance of this sector to the plan demonstrated?</p>	<p>There is an Events Policy located with the Economic Development Unit and an Arts and Culture Policy and Recreation Strategy located within Community and Recreation Planning Department, however there appears to be little synergy between these policies.</p>

It can be seen from this table that the Dunedin City Council does not fare well according to Evans' benchmarks.

All the organisations interviewed felt that being located in Dunedin had a specific effect on their operation. The small population of the city made their communities accessible and easily defined, and there was a long history of cultural projects that influenced the way that these organisations had chosen to operate. This provided a further argument for the need to have adequate support within their locality. The desire to create an arts industry hub (mooted by one of the organisations) represents an ideal opportunity for local government involvement, since it would also achieve one of Evans' benchmarks.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that community-based cultural organisations exist as a new breed of cultural organisation. My study of organisations in Dunedin, New Zealand shows that, in this locality at least, a new form of cultural organisation is emerging, combining the community-oriented objectives of community arts practice with those of the commercially-oriented creative industries. This has resulted in organisational goals that place equal emphasis on process and product. By combining these goals, organisations have responded to much of the criticism levelled at previous community arts practice. These organisations are hampered, however, by gaps in cultural policy, both locally and centrally, that limit their ability to gain legitimacy and agency in either the arts or the creative industry fields.

The commodity/public good split in cultural policy has been criticised by theorists as lacking an appreciation of the symbiotic nature of the arts and the creative industries (Mercer 1998b; Volkerling 2001) However, this still remains the dominant discourse for both central government and local government. My research demonstrates that if organisations such as those studied are to be supported by government policy, a more integrated policy approach needs to be adopted. Such an approach would need to combine economic and social outcomes as integral elements of the field of cultural practice and production. Current practice acts as a barrier to organisations seeking to operate in both spheres, unless greater integration is achieved.

During the period I was researching, New Zealand was in the process of adopting a new *Local Government Amendment Act 2002* that has legislated for local government to having a greater role in cultural planning. This legislation offers an opportunity for local government to develop a more integrated approach to cultural policy than has occurred in the past. With existing programmes such as Creative New Zealand's Regional Strengths program, which is targeted at local authorities who already push some of the policy barriers, this is an area that would benefit from further investigation.

In order to support community-based cultural organisations, policy makers (particularly at the local government level) need to formulate and implement an integrated approach to cultural policy. The separation of community from industry is no longer appropriate and may lead to further marginalisation and social isolation for some cultural groups. As the Dunedin City Council has demonstrated, having an appropriate policy is not enough; an

implementation strategy must also be put in place to ensure that organisations have access to the resources they require. This strategy needs to be accompanied by a benchmarking exercise, such as the one developed by Evans (2001), to ensure cultural planning objectives are met.

In conclusion, this paper argues for a breaking down of barriers between what is understood of community arts practice and the creative industries. The study has shown that, in one locality at least, there exist a number of organisations that cross the boundaries of both sectors and have encountered difficulties as a result. That community-based cultural organisations may have more in common with the creative industries than with traditional arts organisations is significant for policy makers and organisational advisers alike. New ways of accommodating such organisations need to be found, and this paper suggests some alternatives for developing an inclusive cultural policy.

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